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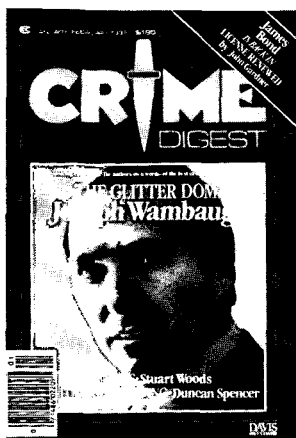


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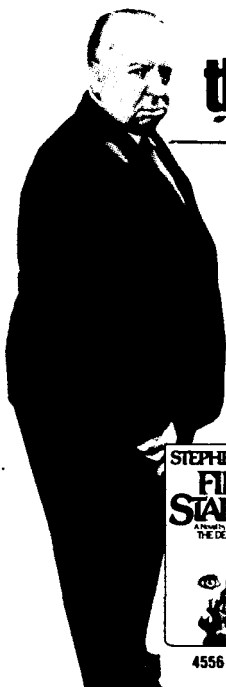
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ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE Vol. 27, No. 3, March 3, 1982. Published 13 times a year, every 28 days, by Davis Publications, Inc., at \$1.25 a copy. Annual subscription \$16.25 in the U.S.A. and possessions; \$18.50 elsewhere payable in advance in U.S. funds. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10017. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 1932, Marion, O. 43305. Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing office. © 1982 by Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention. Reproduction or use without express permission of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Printed in U.S.A. All submissions must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.

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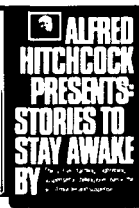
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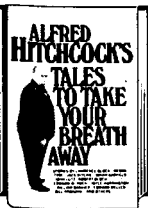
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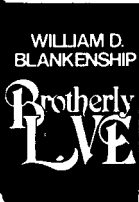
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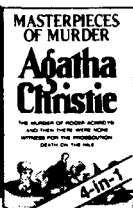
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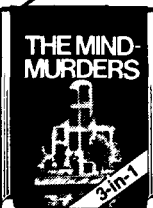
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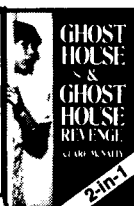
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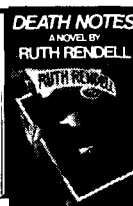
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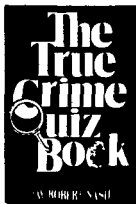
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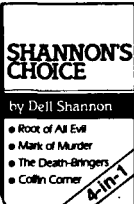
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Dear Readers:



Two of AHMM's most distinguished writers are featured in this issue, and because it's also getting to be a time when AHMM's association with them reaches some significant anniversaries, we thought you would like to know a bit about them. They are James Holding and Lawrence Treat.

Our cover story for this issue, one we hope will delight you as much as it did us, is "China Trader," James Holding's seventy-fifth story for AHMM. Coincidentally, Mr. Holding will celebrate his seventy-fifth birthday next month.

In spite of all those stories (and about two hundred stories and articles elsewhere), Mr. Holding got a late start as a short story writer. He spent his first twenty-eight years after graduating from Yale (and after a year's bicycle trip through Europe) as a copy writer and copy chief at BBDO, a national advertising agency, where he became a vice-president in 1949. In 1957, at the age of 50, he retired from the advertising business to take up a second career as a writer of mystery stories, travel articles, and children's books (twenty to date).

"China Trader" is set in Hong Kong and its surrounding waters, a part of the world familiar to its author, who is widely traveled and who always goes by ship. As AHMM's readers know, Mr. Holding often writes of faraway places, and always ones he himself knows well. A Holding story is likely to be set in Florence or Kenya, Bangkok or Buenos Aires, Lucerne or the Philippines, and all of them have his special touch of authenticity.

Lawrence Treat, unlike Mr. Holding, practiced his first profession of law for only two months before deciding, in 1928, to become a writer instead. In 1945, after half a dozen mystery novels and a number of stories, he published his first police procedural novel, *V As in Victim*, the beginning of a notable series of procedural novels and short stories. One of the latter, "H As in Homicide," won the Edgar Allan Poe Award from the Mystery Writers of America for best short story of 1964.

Mr. Treat's first story for AHMM appeared in this magazine's sixth issue, in May of 1957, almost twenty-five years ago. And four years ago, with "A Matter of Jurisdiction," he began the engaging series of tales involving Chief Willy Wharton of LePage

County and Chief Dan Moorhead of Morgan County. "A Matter of Family," in this issue, is the ninth of their joint adventures.

While he was writing mystery fiction, Mr. Treat was also concocting mystery puzzles. His first collection, *Bringing Sherlock Home*, was published in 1935. Early last fall, mystery readers were treated to a new one, *Crime and Puzzlement*, an entertaining collection of twenty-four picture-mysteries complete with a drawing of the scene of the crime (the room from which the Van Bliven necklace was stolen, the floor plan of the bungalow where a coin collector's body was found) and all the necessary clues to the solving thereof. Its publishers had 75,000 copies in print shortly thereafter, and Mr. Treat is currently at work on a sequel.

It has been a pleasure to have had their stories to read all these years—and it is a pleasure to bring you their newest ones.

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Captain Fong was only a fisherman, but someone wanted to make him rich. . . .

CHINA TRADER



The *Sea Dragon* was a trawler, 21 meters long, built in Taiwan. She possessed a quite astonishing turn of speed for a fishing boat of her size and portly lines. She rode lazily at anchor now, rising and falling on the smooth green swells midway of the Taiwan Straits. The December day was cool and clear; the coastline of Fujian Province on the mainland of China could be dimly discerned from the roof of the boat's wheelhouse.

And that's where the skipper of the *Sea Dragon*, Fong Kam Lee, was

squatting, with a cheap pair of Hong Kong-made binoculars held up to his eyes. Below him, his crew of four lined the starboard rail, gazing landward, sharing his vigil. And below them, the capacious holds of the fishing boat were solidly packed to the hatch covers with cargo.

The cargo, however, was not fish.

Through his glasses, Captain Fong picked out the Chinese flag at the masthead of a boat approaching from the mainland. He gave a grunt of satisfaction. The Chinese buyers. It was well past the arranged rendezvous time. But of course, Fong reflected, a man who did business on the open sea should expect schedules to be slightly elastic.

He called down to his crew, "Here they come at last!"

Wan Hu, the syndicate's representative, called from the bow in a relieved voice, "And about time, too!"

To tell the truth, Fong felt a surge of relief himself. This was his first run. He badly wanted it to turn out well. Only now, with the buyers actually in sight, did he realize how tense he had been during their twenty-hour run from Hong Kong. He set his binoculars down and rubbed his eyes.

Fong was a chunky, square-faced man in his middle thirties, robust, cheerful of manner, and surprisingly soft of voice except when issuing orders to his crew. He had an indefinable set to his shoulders that suggested independence of character. Or, perhaps, a stiff neck. He was given to larding his conversations with home-made aphorisms.

When he put his glasses to his eyes again, the Chinese boat was only three or four cable-lengths away, and slowing to make its approach to the *Sea Dragon*. It was smaller than the *Sea Dragon*, he noted . . . only nine meters . . . but was making hard going of it in the long swells. Fong could see figures on the deck, several of them waving gaily in his direction. Fong waved back.

In doing so, fortunately, he did not remove the binoculars from his eyes.

Without their magnification, he would not have seen the man in the green Mao jacket crouching slightly behind the others as though trying to hide.

The man in the green Mao jacket had a rifle in his hands.

Captain Fong leaped to his feet. He cupped his hands around his mouth. "It's a trap!" he shouted to his crew. "They're armed with guns! Wan Hu! Slash the anchor line! Pirates! Let's get out of here!"

The approaching boat was almost alongside now. Mr. Fong was scrambling down from his wheelhouse roof when he heard a loud bang, then another and another, felt a sharp pain in his right leg, and saw the little finger of his left hand, in which he still clutched his binoculars, suddenly explode and blow away.

He fell to the deck and dimly, as though in a distant place that had no connection with the Straits of Taiwan, or with him, he felt his fishing boat vibrate powerfully as its engines caught and roared. He felt the bow, released from the anchor's restraint, come around sharply and begin to nose into the swells with increasing speed.

Then all awareness faded away in a long sickening swoop, and Mr. Fong fainted.

Fong Kam Lee had frequently been heard to observe that Memory is the step-daughter of Idleness; also, that Reflection is what we engage in when we have nothing else to do.

Both of these homely truths recurred to him as he lay in a Hong Kong hospital bed recuperating from two bullet holes in his right leg and an amputation of the little finger of his left hand. He had plenty of time to remember. And nothing else to do but reflect.

He remembered quite clearly, for instance, the day he made Wan Hu's acquaintance.

A sampan girl named Mei Sun had ferried Wan Hu out to the *Sea Dragon's* anchorage in Aberdeen Harbor, a few cable lengths off the fish market wharf where Shek Paiwan Road edged the bay. Fong remembered the slim, straw-hatted Mei Sun in baggy black trousers and blue T-shirt, emblazoned with the name of a Kowloon tailor, bringing her sampan smartly alongside his trawler to allow Wan Hu to clamber aboard. Wan Hu told Mei Sun to wait. She made her sampan fast to the *Sea Dragon*.

Wan Hu strode forward and bowed formally to Fong. "I am Kee Wan Hu," he introduced himself, "an official of the Aberdeen docks. Welcome to Hong Kong."

Fong returned the bow solemnly, trying not to stare too noticeably at Wan Hu's face. Sometime, somehow, Wan Hu had received a knife cut across his face from ear to ear just below his nose. The resulting scar drew Wan Hu's features comically to one side, and replaced his upper lip, lopped off by the knife stroke, with a mass of crinkled scar tissue that failed to meet his lower lip properly when his mouth was closed. It was

the face of a clown. But for all that, Fong felt dignity in the man, a hint of latent strength that was far from comical. Fong said, "I am Fong Kam Lee from Taiwan."

"The owner of this fishing boat?"

Fong bowed again. "By virtue of inheritance. My father joined his ancestors four weeks ago."

"You have come to Hong Kong to fish commercially?"

"That is my intention. I have heard one's catch brings higher prices here."

"That is true, yes. But may I, without offense, suggest to you that there are better ways to turn a profit here than by fishing?"

Fong gave Wan Hu a puzzled look. "So?"

Wan Hu nodded. "Have I your permission to tell you about one of them?"

"Certainly. May I offer you some tea?"

Wan Hu shook his head. "No tea, thank you."

The two men sat down side by side on one of the *Sea Dragon's* hatch covers. "Before you begin," said Fong, "I should warn you that the fishing business is all I know. And my father before me."

The clownish face was distorted into what Fong decided must be intended as a smile. "You know how to sail this boat, don't you? From one place to another?"

"Of course."

"And how to anchor it in deep water at a designated spot?"

"That, too."

"Good," said Wan Hu. "That is all that is required to permit you to change your profession today, if you care to."

"From fisherman to what?" asked Fong cautiously.

"Sea trader."

"Trading what?"

"Color television sets," said Wan Hu quietly. "Radios. Cassette recorders. Pocket calculators. Hong Kong jeans."

Fong raised his eyebrows in surprise. Then he said, "What are Hong Kong jeans?"

"These trousers I am wearing are Hong Kong jeans."

"Oh. Levis. Yes. We have them in Taiwan, too."

"But they don't have them in China," said Wan Hu. "That's the point."

He coughed. "Nor those other items of merchandise, either. Unless people like you and me supply them."

"Red China?" The distaste of a man from Taiwan was evident in Fong's question.

"Why not? In all the big mainland cities, a flourishing black market exists in such merchandise. The urban Chinese are willing to pay generously for such luxury items."

"Pay with what?" asked Fong contemptuously.

"Silver coins," said Wan Hu. "Gold bars. Ginseng and other herbal medicines."

Fong couldn't tell from Wan Hu's grotesque face whether he was serious or not. He asked skeptically, "Silver coins? In Red China?"

"Millions of them. Struck between 1911 and the Communist takeover in 1947. Most of them were apparently squirreled away as a reserve for emergencies." Wan Hu shrugged. "Anyway, they are plentiful now that China's economic policies have been liberalized."

"They can't be worth much," said Fong.

"As coins, no. As troy ounces of silver, yes. Each coin contains about fifty Hong Kong dollars' worth of pure silver at today's silver prices."

"Widespread evil occasionally spawns local good," said Fong sententially. He was impressed. "You are actually talking about smuggling, are you not, Wan Hu?"

"Hong Kong is a free port. We have no export duties. The authorities here do not object to such trading."

"But the Chinese authorities do?"

Wan Hu nodded. "That is why the trading is done at rendezvous far out at sea. To escape the notice of Chinese coast guard patrols, which, incidentally, also interfere with successful fishing. To try to halt the smuggling, China has banned fishing within a 37-kilometer belt along the coast of Guangxi and Quandong provinces."

Fong was silent, thinking. Precipitous decisions, he had observed, often led to the precipice of Misfortune. Yet he was intrigued by Wan Hu's words. He asked, at length, in a carefully disinterested voice, "Are the profits of this China trade very great?"

"One hundred percent profit is common on each trip. The ship's captain gets thirty percent. Crew members can earn as much as two thousand dollars, American, on a single trip . . . twice their income for a *year* of fishing."

Fong hummed under his breath. "So much? There must be other risks, then, beside the Chinese coast patrols?"

"There are," said Wan Hu frankly. "Pirates."

Fong gazed across the waters of Aberdeen Harbor. "This is all very complicated for a simple Taiwanese fisherman," he murmured. "I am confused. Why are you, a public official, suggesting that I become one of these China traders?"

Wan Hu spread his thin hands. "I am not, actually, a genuine public official. I am merely the humble representative of the Hong Kong Syndicate that organizes the China trade. We import the merchandise from Japan and export it to China in boats like yours. If you agree to become a trader, I shall accompany you on each trip to guard the syndicate's interests and supervise your negotiation with the China buyers." Wan Hu's tongue came out and licked briefly at the scar tissue below his nose. "Are you interested, Mr. Fong?"

"Profit looks equally attractive to the wise man and the fool," said Fong. "I am interested."

Lying in his hospital bed, Fong reflected wryly on his total profits as a China trader: two bullet holes in his leg and a missing finger.

Wan Hu visited him in the hospital.

"Very bad luck, Mr. Fong," said Wan Hu, "to be attacked by pirates on your first trip."

"Yes," Fong agreed, "and bad luck, also, that you were forced to hurry me back to Hong Kong without selling our cargo."

Wan Hu shrugged. "We transhipped the cargo to another fishing boat and sold it three days later at a very handsome profit indeed."

"Good," said Fong, "because I do not intend to return to your China trade. The man is an utter fool who does not heed celestial warnings."

"You are not willing to try again?"

"I am not. For my crew's sake and my own, I regret the loss of the easy riches you proffered. But I shall not try again. From now on, I am only a fisherman."

"I am sorry," said Wan Hu, his scarred face attempting to express some sentiment, whether anger or pity Fong could not tell. "If that is your final decision, Mr. Fong, may your fishing nets always bulge with fat fishes."

"Thank you," said Mr. Fong, bowing as best he could while lying in his bed. "I hope we shall meet again."

Mei Sun, the sampan girl, also visited him in the hospital.

She entered his room like a fresh sea breeze, cool and fragrant. Her T-shirt today was pink and bore the name of a Hong Kong jeweler.

Fong, seated now in a chair beside his bed, rose slowly and bowed to her. "Mei Sun," he said politely, "you are kind to visit me."

"I came to thank you, Mr. Fong," said Mei Sun.

"To thank me?" Fong was puzzled. "For what?"

"For getting shot." She dimpled and her eyes sparkled.

"I fail to see how my wounds could afford you pleasure," said Fong somewhat stiffly.

"Not pleasure," said Mei Sun. "Profit."

"Profit?" Fong repeated the word like a pet mynah bird.

"Yes, Mr. Fong. I was paid very generously by the syndicate for ferrying your cargo in my sampan from the docks to your fishing boat, don't you remember?"

"Of course I remember." Mei Sun had been as adept at the job as a man twice her size.

"I made a splendid profit. Then, when you were shot by pirates, I was hired again. To move the same cargo to another fishing boat. Thus, a second splendid profit, don't you see?" She smiled at him. "So, thank you for being shot."

Fong sighed. "One man's disaster is another man's triumph," he said.

"Woman's," said Mei Sun, laughing. Her laugh sounded like the musical tinkling of wind chimes. "*Woman's* triumph, in this case."

Fong regarded her curiously. "You seem to possess an unusual fondness for money," he said.

"I've been poor all my life. No matter how hard I work, I remain poor." She scowled defensively. "Of course I like money. Don't you?"

Fong nodded. "I suppose I do. Wealth is the fertilizer for the garden of beautiful flowers."

"Not necessarily," said Mei Sun provocatively. "I'm not ugly, am I? And yet, I'm very poor."

She sat down on the edge of Fong's empty hospital bed. "But I don't intend to remain poor forever. Do you?"

"It's no fun getting shot," Fong replied.

"When you're well, will you try the China trade again?"

Fong shook his head. "I shall go back to fishing."

"And reject the chance to get rich?"

"Fishing is my trade," said Fong with dignity. "If it denies me riches . . ."

"As it will . . ."

" . . . I shall accept poverty with grace."

"There is no need to do that," said Mei Sun, "when you can fish to your heart's content and *still* win riches." She fixed him with an earnest glance. "Riches for yourself and your crew. And for *me*, as well."

"Are you joking?" asked Fong, admiring her slender figure and piquant face.

"I am not joking, Mr. Fong."

To keep her there a little longer, Fong said, "Then tell me how this miracle can be accomplished."

Mei Sun told him.

The fishing, at first, went well.

Each day, the *Sea Dragon* left Aberdeen Harbor at dawn and returned before dusk with her holds full of fat fishes that Fong sold to the wholesalers on Fish Market Wharf. Her crew worked smoothly together; her skipper seemed to possess the mysterious fisherman's instinct for the most productive fishing grounds; and since all sea food was becoming scarce in Hong Kong's restaurants because so many fishing boats had switched from fishing to smuggling, Fong's catches were snapped up at excellent prices. The future looked bright.

Then, after weeks of signal success, things suddenly started to go wrong. The fishing grounds, once so productive, now began to yield their denizens only grudgingly to Fong's wiles. The *Sea Dragon's* daily catches gradually went from abundant to sparse, from sparse to pitiful.

Fong shrugged his shoulders and observed philosophically that he who follows the fishing trade must learn to follow the fishes. So the *Sea Dragon* went farther and farther afield in search of its elusive prey, often remaining away from its Aberdeen anchorage overnight. Fong and his crew worked longer and longer hours, applied all their combined expertise to improving their fishing luck. And for a few weeks, it seemed they might succeed. Their catches from the distant fishing grounds *did* improve. But only slightly.

One evening, Fong was seated in a small Aberdeen restaurant eating a lonely dinner of chicken cooked with almonds, water chestnuts, and

bamboo sprouts when Wan Hu came in and sat down, uninvited, at Fong's table.

"Greetings, Mr. Fong," said Wan Hu. "How are things going for you?"

Fong bowed. "Wan Hu," he said politely, "it is a pleasure to see you again. You behold in me an unsuccessful fisherman. My luck continues to be bad."

"So?" said Wan Hu. "You have my sympathy."

"Thank you. Will you have some dinner, Wan Hu?"

"I am not here to eat. It is my curiosity that brings me to your table."

"What are you curious about?"

"Several things." The mask of Wan Hu's face twisted; Fong could not be sure whether in anger or cunning. "You say your fishing has been bad. Yet it has come to my ears that your three crew members yesterday bought Rolex watches for themselves from Han Ming, the jeweler on Hupei Street."

Fong arrested his chopsticks halfway to his mouth. "Rolex watches? My crew?"

Wan Hu nodded. "And the sampan girl, Mei Sun, bought a large green jade ring, a very expensive one, last week. Also from Han Ming."

Fong said, "It is no business of mine how my crew spend their wages."

"Nor Mei Sun?"

"Nor Mei Sun."

"The strange thing about these purchases," Wan Hu went on, "is that they were paid for with Chinese silver coins such as are used to pay us for the Japanese goods we smuggle into China."

"Ah," said Fong. "That is curious. Unless you are mistaken."

"I am not mistaken. As a representative of the syndicate, I have many trustworthy informants in Aberdeen."

"Well," said Fong, "it has nothing to do with me." He took another bite of chicken.

"Please," said Wan Hu, "may I tell you a little story, Mr. Fong?"

Fong chewed his chicken, crunching the almonds viciously as though they were responsible for the toughness of the fowl. "Since I was a child," he said, "I have loved stories."

"Two days ago," said Wan Hu, "I went as syndicate representative on an Aberdeen fishing boat to sell a load of luxury merchandise to buyers from China. We reached our prearranged rendezvous, 25 kilometers off the coast of Fujian province, at the proper time. There we waited for six

hours. Our Chinese buyers did not show up. We had almost despaired of their arrival when they at last appeared. But they no longer had any gold, silver, or herbal medicines with which to purchase our cargo. They had been robbed by pirates on the way to our rendezvous. Posing as a trading boat from Hong Kong, the pirates allowed the buyers to come aboard. Then at knife point, they relieved them of their treasure, crippled their boat, put them back on board, and quickly hastened away at great speed." Wan Hu paused for Fong to comment.

"An unfortunate turn of events for you, Wan Hu," said Fong, "but not uncommon, presumably, since I was myself attacked by pirates on my first trip as a trader."

"True. But the pirates who shot you were after our cargo. These pirates stole the trader's buying funds. They were after ready cash, not black market goods."

"The wise man prefers present cash to future promises," said Fong. "It is only sensible."

"You know what I think, Mr. Fong?" asked Wan Hu.

"No. But I am sure you are going to tell me."

"I think *you* were the pirate who robbed our China buyers."

With an injured air, Fong said, "What a macabre idea! May I ask why you think that?"

"Certainly," said Wan Hu politely: "Because of your crew's new Rolex watches. Because of Mei Sun's new green jade ring. And principally because the leader of the pirates, according to the traders, favored his right leg when he walked and had only four fingers on his left hand."

"Ah," sighed Fong, "from the first, I had misgivings about my missing finger." He looked sorrowfully at his left hand.

"Are you the pirate?" asked Wan Hu insistently.

"If I admit it, what then? Your syndicate will no doubt seek redress."

Wan Hu shook his head. "The syndicate knows nothing about this . . . yet. Nor do they need to know, even if you continue your . . . ah . . . long journeys to find better fishing grounds." Wan Hu snickered.

"You would keep the syndicate in ignorance?"

"For a consideration, yes."

"A consideration of what nature?"

"Twenty percent," said Wan Hu, "is a nice consideration."

Fong bowed his head. "That seems fair. And perhaps, from now on,

you will be more forthcoming to Mei Sun about your rendezvous sites and times? Thus far, she has been forced to worm the information out of your ships' captains and crews by guile."

Wan Hu smiled his comical smile. "I'll cooperate a hundred percent. In exchange for twenty." Wan Hu beckoned to the waiter. "I think I shall have some chicken and almonds, after all," he said, "to celebrate our pact."

"Don't," advised Fong. "The chicken is as tough as a syndicate representative's heart."

Several months later, Wan Hu and Mei Sun came to the hospital together. This time, Fong was unable even to sketch a bow to them as they entered his room. The bullet had pierced his left shoulder, narrowly missing his lung.

Wan Hu's ugliness was as comical as ever. Mei Sun looked prettier than usual in tight-fitting Hong Kong jeans and a spotless white T-shirt innocent of any advertising. She was wearing her large green jade ring.

Ignoring ritual formal greetings, Wan Hu's first words were, "What happened?"

"A stupid mistake on my part," said Fong apologetically. "I mistook a Chinese coast guard patrol boat for a China trader hastening to a rendezvous. We barely escaped with our lives, thanks only to the superior speed of the *Sea Dragon*."

Very gently, Mei Sun patted the bulky bandage that encased Fong's shoulder. "I am sorry, Mr. Fong," she said.

Her expression was one of dismay and contrition. "Your painful wound is my fault. My greed caused it."

"Do not blame yourself, Mei Sun. I should have known disaster would strike. And the truly wise man, when peril looms, avoids it."

"How could you know disaster would strike?" Wan Hu was skeptical.

"It was my sixth act of piracy," explained Fong. "And the number six has always traditionally been unlucky for my family. My beloved mother, when I was but a small boy, choked to death on her sixth cup of tea one night at our dinner table. My father was 66 years of age when he died last year. One of my cousins was born with six toes on each foot. Also, if you remember, I was shot by pirates on the sixth day of the month. And my revered grandmother lost her life while giving birth to her sixth child."

"Nevertheless," said Wan Hu, "you were *not* killed by the shore patrol. And our agreement has been very lucrative for all of us. Will you not continue it when you recover?"

"I do not know," said Fong reflectively. "I think I shall consult Tin Hau before I decide."

On the day he was released from the hospital, Fong went directly to the Temple of Tin Hau, the patron saint of fishermen, to thank the goddess for his two miraculous escapes from death, and to ask her advice about his future.

Afterward, returning to the Aberdeen docks, he found Mei Sun waiting to ferry him out to the *Sea Dragon* in her sampan. She seated him in her small craft, unshipped her oar, and with the precise economy of movement which characterized all her actions, maneuvered the sampan out into the harbor.

"Did you consult Tin Hau?" she asked.

"I did." Fong watched with keen appreciation the flowing play of her muscles as she worked.

"Tell me about it," Mei Sun invited.

"Well, first I thanked her for saving my life twice."

Mei Sun nodded approval. "That was the least you could do."

"Yes. She accepted my thanks very graciously. Then I asked her about my future."

"And she advised you?"

"Indeed. Although, to tell the truth, her advice was not as graciously given as her acceptance of my thanks."

"Nevertheless, she *did* advise you?"

"Oh, yes. She said sternly that I had proved an embarrassment to her since coming to Hong Kong. That I had failed at smuggling, fishing, and piracy, all three, getting shot twice in the process, and causing her considerable difficulty as a result, since it is not easy to save the life of a fisherman who has been shot."

Mei Sun smiled and nodded and pushed on her oar.

"I protested," Fong continued, "that as a pirate, I had accumulated considerable wealth successfully. To which she replied brusquely that getting shot through the shoulder was not her idea of success."

Mei Sun said, "I can understand the goddess's point of view."

"I, also. In any event, Tin Hau said, since I was no longer a simple honest fisherman, she wished to disavow me with some parting advice."

Mei Sun swung her oar powerfully through the water. "What did she advise you to do?"

"She advised me to sell my fishing boat and marry a woman to keep me out of trouble . . . a woman with two very important qualifications." Fong paused and looked out toward the *Sea Dragon* wistfully. Mei Sun, fascinated, also paused in her rowing.

"First," said Fong, "the goddess said I must marry a very *beautiful* woman who would propitiate with her charms the evil demons of bad luck that have recently dogged me. And second, Tin Hau told me to be sure that the woman I marry neither possesses, nor has any knowledge of . . ." Fong broke off and looked at Mei Sun. ". . . Mei Sun," he said, "do you know anything about firearms?"

"Only that they terrify me."

"Ah," said Fong. "Excellent. Will you marry me, Mei Sun?"

Mei Sun stopped rowing. After a brief pause, she said, "I shall be honored to become your wife, Mr. Fong." She bowed over her oar. "On one condition."

"And what is that?"

"You must promise me that we will have only five children."

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He could have called for help, but they would have laughed at him. . . .

NIGHT WATCH HERO ^{by} PAUL AMEDICK



A drop of perspiration streaked down his throat and chest, down behind the little fox on his light blue pullover shirt. Harvey Nimmons steered his Pinto into yet another cul-de-sac and thought that it was too hot for this late in the summer. And much too hot to be wasting his Saturday night driving all over the neighborhood like a fool.

His hand fondled the portable citizen's band radio on the seat beside

him, then pulled back as if it had burned. I won't make that mistake again.

Harvey leaned forward and held his wrist up to the dashboard lights. Nearly midnight. Only two hours to go on his shift.

His car lights lapped gently over the cracks in the winding concrete road and illuminated asphalt driveways leading up to redwood carports. Harvey peered through the windshield at the half-moon shadows cast by trees scattered over neatly trimmed lawns. Could be someone lurking behind any one of them, he thought. Ridiculous.

He tried to refocus his mind on more pleasant things, like tomorrow's regular Sunday afternoon softball game with the guys from the office. Nice to escape from the house for a while, even with a bunch of other middle-aged architectural draftsmen who thought they were Pete Rose or Reggie Jackson.

The heat trapped during the day seemed to rise up from the road and enter the cramped car. Harvey shifted his slight frame and pushed his thinning hair back from his forehead, hesitating for a moment on the balding spot in the back. He gripped the steering wheel and willed his mind to concentrate on watching, but the heat and the sweat running down his neck kept reminding him of the early summer evening that had gotten him into this.

The school auditorium that Sunday evening had been crowded with angry citizens shouting their concern over the rash of burglaries that had invaded the quiet South Jersey suburb of Chestnut Run Township. Harvey slouched in his front-row seat, holding himself midway between his wife, Norah, on his left and an old man dozing on his right, trying to keep his sweat-soaked shirt from touching anything. And trying not to be noticed by the three town leaders seated on folding chairs on the platform. The honorable councilmen—Harris, Wiley, and Steinberg. Sounds like a law firm, Harvey thought.

He stared at his mud-encrusted sneakers and tried to block out the overpowering sounds of the voices raised around him.

Norah elbowed his ribs. "Sit up straight, Harvey. And for God's sake, pay attention." And then she was on her feet, waving her pudgy arm at the council chairman. "Ralph! Ralph Harris! We've debated this long enough. We need this program. I know it and you know it and I call for a vote right now."

The Chestnut Run Neighborhood Watch program was born that night.

"Norah, I really don't think this is for me."

"Harvey, you have to do your part too. What's the big deal? You'll put in your time like everyone else."

The time! Past time to check in. Harvey stretched out his hand and searched in the dark seat beside him for the portable radio. "This is unit fifteen, unit one-five calling base. Come in."

The high-pitched voice of Edna Hopkins, the town clerk who was on as "dispatcher" that night, crackled over the speaker.

"That you, Nimmons? Everything all right out there?"

"Yes, Edna. Everything is quiet here. No problems."

"That's good. Sure hope you don't have any more trouble, like you did last month."

Harvey felt himself flush as he heard her giggle come over the radio, and quickly snapped the set off. There was no need for that. Not with everyone else on the network listening in. And laughing now. One little mistake. It was only his second night out, and who could blame him for calling out the police backup unit? Lights shouldn't go on in someone's house when they're on vacation. Unless they have automatic timers, he thought bitterly. One little false alarm and everyone thought it was so darn funny. Particularly Norah.

Harvey jammed the radio down between the seats and tried to push the memory from his mind. Concentrate on the road, he told himself.

The cry of a mockingbird filtered through the open window, carried on the still air, and Harvey thought of the squawking of gulls fighting over scraps of bait as he fished alone in a small boat. Norah didn't like fishing. He smiled.

Harvey turned right onto Walnut Lane, the last of the streets in his assigned area.

Manicured lawns and trimmed shrubs protected each two-story house from the intrusion of its neighbors. No raucous parties here on celebrity row, Harvey thought.

He hunched forward with his forearms on the steering wheel and glared into the shadowed porches and darkened windows drifting slowly by.

The tiny explosion of breaking glass echoed through the stillness, and Harvey bumped his head lightly on the windshield as he jerked the car to a stop. He cut the engine and turned off the lights. Silence.

And then he heard it. The tinkling of glass falling on a hard surface.

Over there, across the street, somewhere behind the sprawling house directly opposite him.

Harvey reached down and pulled the CB radio from its nest between the seats and flicked it on. He hesitated. Another false alarm? They'd never let him forget it. "Nervous Nimmons" they'd call him. And Norah. What would she have to say? "What, again, Harvey?" He didn't want to think about that.

He turned the radio off. Maybe he could just ignore it, he thought. Who would know he was even here? But if someone did break into a house in his patrol area, that would be a big joke too. Some neighborhood watcher! Steal you blind right under old Harvey's nose. He'd have to check it out, just in case.

Harvey eased the door open, cursing under his breath as the dome light flooded the car. He hopped out and shut the door quickly, careful not to make any sound.

After two tentative steps across the road, he stopped. He didn't like the idea of sneaking around in the dark empty handed. Keeping his eyes on the corner of the large house, Harvey backed up to the rear of the car, fumbled for his car keys, and opened the hatchback. There, under the disarray of old Municipal Building drawings, was his Mike Schmidt-autographed softball bat. That would do. But what if he has a gun? Harvey shook his head to clear his thoughts, and push aside the fear. Don't be ridiculous. It's probably nothing at all.

As he pressed himself against the front corner of the house, Harvey again heard the muted tinkle of glass from the rear, followed by a grunt and a murmured curse.

He took a deep breath and edged down the side of the house, his back rubbing against the warm roughness of the stone siding. At the back corner, he gripped the softball bat tightly and froze. His heart pounded inside his chest, and he thought that surely the thumping could be heard a block away. He held his breath and peered with one eye around the corner. No false alarm this time. The dark figure silhouetted by the moonlight was hunched against the house, intent on prying jagged pieces of glass from the window frame.

Harvey pulled back from the corner and flattened quietly against the house. Have to call in, get the cops here. The sweat ran down his forehead and into his eyes, burning. As he shifted the bat to his left hand and

reached up with his right to wipe his eyes on his sleeve he felt his grip loosening on the bat, slipping down. He grabbed for it.

The sound of the hard wood striking the stone wall was like a gunshot in his ears, ringing out clearly in the stillness.

"Who the hell's that?" A gravelly voice, full of anger and menace.

Harvey gripped the bat in both hands, raised it straight in the air in front of him, and whirled around the corner. "Don't move!" he shouted.

The black figure in front of him hesitated, then raised his arm and took a step forward. Moonlight glinted on a shiny surface. "I'll don't move you!"

The man took another step forward, and Harvey swung, feeling the soft crunch of the bat as it struck. The man collapsed face down at Harvey's feet.

Harvey stood paralyzed, his breath coming in gasps, his hands shaking. The bat slipped from his fingers and slid to the ground beside him, echoing hollowly on the paving stones and rolling up against the still figure.

Harvey slumped to his knees and gingerly touched the shoulder of the man on the ground. He prodded him gently, then more firmly. No movement. No sound. He placed his fingers on the man's neck, to feel for a pulse the way they did on television, but jerked his hand back as he felt the warm stickiness.

Standing on trembling legs Harvey stooped over the figure, gripped one shoulder with both hands, and slowly pulled the weight toward him. The moonlight reflected on the whiteness of the man's face, and cast a shadow on half his features. A dark smear spread across his forehead. The man rolled fully onto his back, one arm flapping to the side and striking Harvey's leg.

Harvey jumped back, stared at the man's face, and gasped. Councilman Wiley! As the realization hit him, Harvey clutched his stomach, staggered to a tree, fell to his knees, and retched. Nausea swept over him and acid bile burned his throat.

When he could breathe again, Harvey wiped his eyes with his sleeve and slumped to the ground with his back against the tree. Why the hell was he trying to break into a house? He's no burglar. And then Harvey knew, and the waves of nausea washed over him again.

As his head cleared, he stared at the still form lying by the house, then forced himself to his feet using the tree for support. He had to get help.

No help for the dead, he thought. He had to tell the police, tell them Councilman Wiley had been killed breaking into his own house.

Harvey bent over the body and saw the long, thick screwdriver on the ground by the dead man's shoulder. Almost in a trance, Harvey picked up the softball bat which stuck out from under the body, and turned the corner of the house.

When he saw his car parked on the opposite side of the road, he broke into a run. Flopping into the front seat, he pulled the door closed and put his face in his hands. Sobs shook his body and hot tears joined the sweat running down his cheeks.

Finally he leaned back in the seat, his neck arched back, gasping in the still night air. He took a deep breath and fumbled for the radio. He clutched it in his sweaty hand, turned it on, and pushed the talk button.

What am I going to say? That I just killed Councilman Wiley? Blurred images flew through his mind. The thundering voice of the public prosecutor. A steel door slamming closed behind him. Striped uniforms. Stinking toilets. Rats. Disgrace. Norah's shrill voice. "You damn fool."

He dropped the radio and rested his head against the car seat, consciously controlling his breathing. In. Out. Think. His head jerked forward and his hands gripped the steering wheel. Quickly he snapped the car door open and hopped out. Nothing either way. No cars. No late night dog walkers. The mockingbird was still singing in a far off tree, as if nothing had happened in the past ten minutes. Harvey turned in a circle. No lights on in any of the houses on the block. He wiped his forehead and eyes with a handkerchief.

The voice inside his head screamed at him. Run! Get away! Harvey pinched the bridge of his nose and rubbed his eyes. But what if someone saw the car here, while I was . . . back there? No answer to that. Run! Too late.

Harvey reached in the open car door and pulled out the softball bat. Raising the hatchback he removed several large blueprint drawings and carefully wrapped the bat in them, then placed it underneath the rest of the scattered papers.

He sat in the front seat and took a deep breath, then started panting heavily. After a few moments he picked up the two-way radio and spoke breathlessly. "Base, this is Harvey. Come in. Hurry." He waited a few seconds and called again. "C'mon, Edna, this is an emergency."

The radio crackled and Edna's voice came over. "This is base, Harvey. What's the matter with you?"

"Edna, get a patrol car over here fast. There's been a killing."

"What?"

"I said there's been a killing. Get the cops here fast."

"Okay, Harvey, now calm down. Just where are you?"

"Wiley's. Councilman Wiley's place on Walnut Lane. I'm right across the street."

"Stay right there, Harv, and don't worry. I'll have the police there quick."

Harvey dropped the radio and slumped back in the seat. "You see, officer, I was patrolling and I saw this guy running from behind the councilman's house. It was just past twelve thirty. . . ."

"C'mon, Norah, it's almost four. I need some sleep." The rays from the half moon streaked across the flowered sheet, and Harvey pulled the cover up over his chest and closed his eyes. He wanted to close out her voice too.

Norah propped her chin on one pudgy hand as she rolled toward Harvey. "How can you sleep? After all that excitement?"

"I'm really worn out. I've told you everything, so let's forget it for now and let me sleep."

Norah dropped back down on the bed on her back and stared at the ceiling. She sighed. "Who would have thought it? You know, Harvey, you're almost a hero. Being that close to a real murderer. And actually chasing him."

"I didn't really chase him that far. I told you I got out of the car and started after him, but he was too fast so I went back to check the house. That's when I found, you know, the body."

"Yes, but you tried and when they catch him, you'll be a real hero. People in this town will look up to you now."

"He's probably a hundred miles away by now. Took off like a bat. The police will never find him."

Norah rolled toward him and flopped her arm across his chest, pulling him toward her. "Oh, Harvey, I'm so proud of you." She walked her fingers slowly over his chest and down his stomach.

Harvey turned his head toward the open window beside him, staring at the curtains hanging limply in the damp heat and feeling the sweat on

the back of his legs and the knot slowly tightening again in his stomach. "Not now, Norah. It's too hot, and I told you I'm exhausted." And Wiley's bloody fish eye keeps staring at me and I'm going to be sick.

"In the morning then, hon. After you've had some sleep and feel nice and rested." She giggled and snuggled her nose into his neck.

The phone rang.

Norah bumped Harvey's chin as she jumped off him, reached to her nightstand, and grabbed up the receiver. "Hello. Hello."

She cupped her hand over the mouthpiece and shook Harvey. "It's a Sergeant Cummings." Turning back to the phone she said, "What is it, sergeant?" She listened for a few seconds and nudged Harvey again, pointing to the receiver and mouthing words.

He couldn't understand. She listened for several minutes with an occasional "uh-huh" between silences. Finally, she said, "Yes, sergeant, we can do that. We'll be right there." She hung up, a grin spreading over her face.

"I told you you're going to be a hero, Harvey. They got him. They got the man who did it. Isn't that great?"

Harvey bolted upright in bed and stared at his wife. "You've got to be kidding. They couldn't have." His shaking hand rubbed his eyes, trying to wipe out the images that came flooding back. "It's impossible."

"No, it isn't, hon. They got him, and they want us to come down to the station, so you can identify him. Oh, Harvey, isn't it exciting?"

Harvey threw his feet over the side of the bed and started to get up, but sat back down, suddenly dizzy, his stomach churning. He turned to his wife, his voice almost a whisper. "Who is he?"

"No one from around here." Norah was pulling her cotton nightgown up over her head, being careful not to disturb the tiny rollers in her hair. "From somewhere in Massachusetts. Or was it Mississippi? I don't know. They said he's probably just a drifter. A no-good, obviously." She pushed her feet into slippers and flapped into the bathroom.

Harvey called after her. "But how did they find him? Did they put up roadblocks or what?"

Norah's voice was muffled by the water running in the bathroom sink. "I don't know. They found him in the Country Lane Diner, over on Route 206. Just sitting there as pretty as you please."

"Impossible," Harvey muttered, as his head dropped into his hands.

"He tried to run, but they got him." She stuck her head around the

corner of the bathroom door. "C'mon, Harvey. Get a move on. Isn't it exciting? They need our hero down at the police station."

The pale green paint on the walls was chipped and peeling, and Harvey stared past the broad shoulder of the police sergeant sitting opposite him. He concentrated on one pattern in the flaking paint that looked to him like a sea gull, skimming the water.

"Really something, Mr. Nimmons. Mr. Nimmons?"

Harvey slowly refocused his eyes on Sergeant Cummings. "Huh?"

"I said it was really something the way we caught that guy." His voice seemed to fill the tiny room. "Can you imagine the nerve? Sitting right there in the diner, just drinking coffee. Until my boys came in, that is. Tried to bolt out the back, but they nailed him."

Harvey looked down at his hands in his lap, and fiddled with his shirt-tails. Self-consciously, he began to tuck them into his pants. "Didn't get dressed very well. My wife said you wanted us here right away."

"Oh, no hurry really. He'll be in that room in another minute, and then you can get a good look at him." The sergeant indicated a glass panel in the wall beside Harvey, a heavy curtain drawn across it. "Don't worry. He won't be able to see us. It's one-way."

Harvey squirmed in the metal seat. The heat seemed worse in here, and his pants were wet and sticking to his legs.

Harvey watched the sergeant rummage through a stack of papers on the desk, then pull out a neatly typed form. He looked up at Harvey. "I'd like to go over a few details while we're waiting. Won't take long."

Harvey nodded, and ran through the story once more in his mind. The story he'd told the first policeman who had come screeching to a stop beside his car on Walnut Lane. The story he'd repeated to this sergeant and another officer when they had arrived. The story he'd related to Norah when they finally let him go home.

The first time had been hard. But then as he added details, the story became clearer in his own mind. Perhaps if he told it enough times, it would become real, and blot out that other story, the one that was etched in his brain and kept running like a continuous movie behind his eyes.

"You say he had something in his hand, like a stick, but you couldn't tell what it was?"

Harvey jolted back to the present and replayed the sergeant's words

in his mind before answering slowly. "Yes, that's right. I couldn't really tell what it was. But it was long."

"Well, that's not important right now. We'll find it. Now that we know which way he went, we'll search the route and find it, don't you worry."

The sudden buzz of the phone on the desk startled Harvey and he jumped in his chair. Sergeant Cummings lifted the receiver, listened, and hung up. "We're ready." He stood and pulled a cord hanging beside the curtained window.

Harvey kept his eyes on the desk in front of him, not wanting to see through the one-way mirror, not wanting to see at all. Finally, he pulled his eyes from the desk and turned in his chair to stare through the glass. At him. At the man they had caught. In the diner. As calm as you please. Tried to run.

The man slouched in a straight-backed chair in the center of the adjoining room, alone. He turned his head and his dark eyes stared toward the glass, seemed to look into Harvey's eyes, straight through him.

Harvey felt his breath catch in his throat, felt the blood thumping in the veins in his temples, felt his stomach knot into a lump and churn. He slumped forward in his chair.

"Hey, you okay?" The sergeant was beside him, gripping his shoulder. "Just stay still a minute. Keep your head down. I'll get some water. It's a shock to come face to face with a killer. Be right back."

Harvey covered his face in his hands.

As his heartbeat became more regular and his breathing eased, he forced himself to raise his head and look through the glass at the man in the opposite room.

Harvey saw that he was tall, and his arms muscular, stretching the material of his dirty white T-shirt. The man flicked his long black hair back from his forehead, crossed his arms across his chest and tilted the chair. He clumped one foot onto the table in front of him. A dirty black boot.

"He was tall, officer, several inches taller than me. And built, big, you know. He was wearing a T-shirt and jeans, not new ones, faded. And some kind of boots. I could tell by the way he was running. But he was fast, too fast for me. His hair was long, and not too clean-looking, straggly, you know."

Harvey stared at the man. But that could describe thousands of people, he thought. Why did he give them so much detail? So they'd believe

him. It had to be real. And the details just kept coming out. But where did this guy come from? Just passing through. Stopped to have a cup at the all-night Country Lane Diner. Then he ran.

What else had he told them? Harvey rubbed his eyes and leaned back against the chair, remembering.

"Any distinguishing marks, Mr. Nimmons?"

"It happened pretty quick."

"Anything for us to go on. Any details? It's important."

"Well, I think he had some sort of a chain around his waist, as a sort of belt." A tattoo. No, too obvious.

In the next room, the tall man slammed his chair back down, slapped the table and stood up. He began to pace, his hands stuck into the back pockets of his jeans.

Harvey's eyes were riveted to the heavy rope wound through the man's belt loops, tied at the waist and hanging down in two strands.

Just sitting there in the diner, as pretty as you please. He tried to run, but we got him. Harvey stared at the pacing man. Just a drifter, a nobody.

As Harvey watched the man before him, he saw the black and white stripes of the baggy uniform, heard a steel door slam closed, smelled the toilets, heard the rats scuffling beneath the bunk.

Harvey jumped as the sergeant entered behind him, and his hand trembled as he took the cone-shaped paper cup. He gulped the lukewarm water in one swallow, pulled his eyes from the sergeant standing above him, and turned toward the glass.

Harvey closed his eyes, then opened them and swung his body slowly toward the blank wall. He wiped the wetness from his forehead, took a deep breath and focused on the chipped paint, at the gull flying above the cresting waves.

"That's him, sergeant. That's the man."

Sergeant Cummings reached over the desk and picked up the telephone receiver. "Okay, you can take him out now." He pulled the heavy curtain across the window. "Want another drink of water?"

Harvey shook his head and looked up at the policeman. On the floor below a heavy door slammed.

"An interesting thing, Mr. Nimmons. While I was out getting your drink of water I saw your wife. Norah is it?" He crossed his ankles and arms and leaned back against the desk.

Harvey nodded. The heat seemed to press down on him and a small

knot formed in his stomach and moved upward toward his chest, his heart.

The sergeant went on, his voice pouring over Harvey like waves. "She's really impressed with the efficiency of our local police department, the way we snagged that man. Says you were surprised that we caught him. Why is that, Mr. Nimmons?"

Harvey licked his lips, all the moisture suddenly gone from his mouth. "Well, I thought he'd be gone. Out of town."

"Yes, it was strange that he was hanging around the Country Lane like that. We thought so too, but then he did try to run. Funny, that."

Harvey nodded. "Yes, he did try to run, but you got him."

"Yes, we got him. And we checked. Got the word back just a couple minutes ago. He's wanted for assault over in Pennsylvania."

Harvey wiped his forehead and eyes with a now soggy handkerchief and stared at the wall.

"We did some more checking, Mr. Nimmons. You see, he says he was at the Red Ridge Tavern for a couple hours before going to the diner for coffee. We checked there too. Sent some boys out to talk with the bartender. Funny thing, how a man can be in two places at once."

Harvey felt the waves of nausea pass over him. His head spun. The voice boomed, the door slammed, the rats scuffled. Harvey's eyes blurred and the bird on the wall wasn't a gull any more, wasn't anything but chipped paint.



It had an emerald for an eye, and it was one of the professor's treasures. . . .

WORK FOR IDOL HANDS by CHARLES PETERSON



When a party has been out of stir for less than a year, you wouldn't think it so hard for this party to convince another party that he has no interest in a return visit, not even for the class reunion. I am finding it very difficult to get this point across to T. F. O'Toole, however.

"I would not have expected such a turndown," says T. F., shaking his head, "from such an ornament to the profession as Kit the Cat Burglar."

"You may erase the name 'Kit the Cat Burglar' from your memory

banks," I reply. "He is no more. In his place you find Augie Augenblick, gainfully employed as caretaker for the estate of Professor Elbert Huffle-meyer. I gave much thought to the future of Kit the Cat Burglar while stamping out license plates, and decided he didn't have any. I am now a civilian."

T. F. looks unhappy, like a toad who has just snarfed an under-ripe bug—which is one reason he is widely known in the trade, behind his back, as "Toad-Face." I am about to remark on the resemblance when I recall what happens to the last guy who does so within O'Toole's hearing—a guy who winds up with so many stitches he looks like one of those things you hang on the wall that says "Bless Our Happy Home." So I stifle the comment as T. F. sighs, "Too bad! I understand the wall safe is packed with stuff your professor doesn't trust banks with—and is it really true about that doll with the diamond in her forehead?"

"It's not a doll; it's an idol from Africa. And it's not a diamond; it's an emerald the size of an egg. And it's not in the thing's forehead; it's the idol's right eye."

"Thank you," says Toad-Face, jotting all this down in a small notebook. "I like to have all the details clear." He tucks the notebook into a pocket and grins. "As I see it, that thing is worth a fortune and it's there for the picking. And you're just the guy to help me pick it."

Here we go again! I take a deep breath to explain once more why I won't touch this caper with a ten-foot pole. In fact, I won't even touch the pole not to touch it with.

But T. F. casts his eyes heavenward and continues in a thoughtful tone: "In my rambles to and fro about this establishment, I have noticed from time to time a certain very appealing dish with brown hair and blue eyes and a figure that won't quit."

This would be Angela Hufflemeyer, the professor's daughter, and I am more than somewhat taken aback at her sudden appearance in this conversation. "Yeah? What about her?"

Toad-Face delicately gnaws a hangnail and goes "Ptoo!" as he spits it on the sidewalk. "I also note that your hair seems to stand on end when you glance her way, and deduce that there is a certain jenny says quoi in your relationship—am I right?"

"Get to the point, O'Toole!"

"This point is, I am hopeful of your cooperation, because otherwise said dish might get a phone call telling her that she has an ex-con mooning

about the premises. In addition to which, your parole board is apt to get the idea, from anonymous sources, that you have been associating with known criminals, in violation of your parole."

"I haven't either!"

"You're associating with me," retorts T. F., grandly, "and if I ain't a known criminal," he adds with pride, "the work of years is for naught. Think it over, Kit."

"Augie," I reply, automatically, but my heart isn't in it. It is off somewhere looking for mittens and a muffler to overcome that cold feeling it gets as Toad-Face O'Toole strolls off, being careful not to step on the cracks in the sidewalk because he is superstitious about things like that.

There are several reasons why I like my job taking care of Professor Hufflemeyer's place, and cutting five acres of grass with the riding mower is the least of them. For instance, I like his house. It is one of those Victorian jobs in rough stone that looks incomplete without a moat and drawbridge and a few serfs. It has a lofty tower from which to keep an eye peeled for invaders such as traveling salesmen, and lots of high-ceilinged rooms full of Hufflemeyer's anthropological collections. These are mostly rather creepy: carved masks with glowering expressions, lots of knives and spears and bones, voodoo dolls and tom-toms and other odd-looking musical instruments you toot, twang, or bang.

I like the professor, who is small and wiry, with a white goatee, a peppery disposition, and a tendency to go into a lecture on primitive witchcraft at the drop of a hat.

But mostly I like Angela Hufflemeyer. She is, as T. F. O'Toole rightly observed, a dish, although I am not too sure that there is much of anything in the lid, the Hufflemeyer brain supply having evidently been ladled out to excess in the professor. She goes around asking if I don't think the petunias are really tiny ballerinas who pirouette in the moonbeams, and giving it as her opinion that the garden is populated by elves who swing on the spider webs, but what the hell? When she smiles, clouds disappear and birds sing, and if she says the stars are heaven's dewdrops twinkling in the blue, I'll go along with her. Besides, in the kitchen she's a genius.

There is something about being stuck on the horns of a dilemma that shows in a guy's face, I guess, because a few days later the professor is asking what's eating me, and I am denying that it is anything in particular, although it suddenly occurs to me that maybe I can talk him into putting

in some burglar alarms that will discourage O'Toole and get me off the aforementioned horns. "I am somewhat worried about this collection of yours," I say. "I mean, it's worth a pile, obviously, yet you have no security system whatever. Anybody could bust in and walk away with a sackful."

"Augie," he says, "you are needlessly concerned. Have you ever heard me speak of M'Bonga-M'Bunga?"

"If so, it went in one ear and out the next."

"A good friend of mine, from my days in Africa. One of the more highly regarded witch doctors there. I had occasion to rescue him from a rhinoceros to which he was about to become a sort of hood ornament, and the dear chap was most grateful. Gave me a special incantation of his to safeguard one's goods and chattels and keep gnus out of one's boma. Used it himself with great success."

"I don't know about M'Bonga-M'Bunga's boma," I reply, "but what about this thingummy here with the emerald eye and curdled milk look?"

"Bama-Lolo?"

"If you say so. It'd take only about two seconds for somebody to pop that emerald out of there and make off with it."

Professor Hufflemeyer's eyes twinkle, like Angela's heavenly dewdrops. "As a matter of fact, this idol is part of M'Bonga's spell. Bama-Lolo," he goes on, addressing the idol and patting it on the head, "keeps that eye on everything. Don't you, Bam'?"

Well, I ask you, what are you going to do with a household like this, where one member sees petunias dancing in the moonlight and the other gabs with a hunk of kindling? I make one final attempt to persuade the professor to get the joint wired, but he turns testy on me.

"One of my bearers once tried to steal Bama-Lolo," he snaps. "Never saw him again. Come to think of it, every time I look at the idol I am reminded of him. No, Bama-Lolo can take care of himself—and when you finish the yard, Augie, I wish you'd take a look at the garage door. It sticks."

Like the garage door, I, too, am stuck. Angela, I find, won't dream of pressuring Daddy against his wishes and, being immersed in a new recipe for chocolate cookies, is not inclined to bend either of her shapely ears to my warnings. In a somber mood, I trudge out to finish mowing and am not awfully surprised to find a snake in the grass—namely, T. F. O'Toole.

"Ah, there, Kit—er—Augie," says Toad-Face, genially. "Fancy running into you like this. Now, about this business venture of ours: Today is Tuesday, a day my horoscope says is ideal for making big plans and settling details. And by a happy coincidence, Friday finds the moon moving into the house of Scorpio, making it an excellent time for me to move into the house of Hufflemeyer. With your assistance, of course."

"Look, T. F.," I say, desperately, "your horoscope may be saying yes-yes-yes, but I'm telling you that house is a no-no. Hufflemeyer was just explaining to me, it's protected up, down, and sideways by African witch doctor spells. You could shrivel up and blow away, or something."

"Pooh!" says T. F. "Of what avail are the mumblings of an ignorant savage, compared with the illuminations of those who read the stars? Modern science is on my side, and besides," he adds, digging into a pants pocket and pulling out a fuzzy object, "I not only have my rabbit's foot but shall be wearing my good luck derby—the one I was wearing the night I lifted the Vandercook pearls. Now here's the plan. . . ."

It could not have been simpler. All I have to do is forget to check the latches on the french windows leading from the south portico into the trophy room. Toad-Face waits until I am back in my room in the servants wing, of which I am the sole occupant anyway, and when he sees my lights go on therein, he nips into the trophy room, cracks the wall safe, trousers the idol's emerald eye, and nips out again with anything else that happens to stick to his fingers en route.

"And for that small lapse of memory," T. F. continues, "you collect a quick grand. Who knows? You may be inspired to come out of retirement, my boy. Think! The world needs talented performers like you."

"I don't want to collect anything!" I mutter through clenched teeth. "All I want is out of this!"

O'Toole shakes his head. "I was afraid you might take this attitude," he says. "I wonder; do you happen to have Miss Hufflemeyer's phone number handy? Never mind," he adds, in a kindly tone, at my yip of dismay. "I'm sure she's in the book. I already have the number of your parole board."

The rest of Tuesday is bad; Wednesday is worse. I am helping the professor rig up an intercom system with speakers so he can call me in any part of the house, and make one last effort to get him to listen to reason about his collection, but he is trying to fish wires through the walls

and not doing very well at it, and is in no mood to talk about anything else. Afterwards I put it up to Angela again.

"I'm sure Daddy knows best, Augie," she says, looking so adorable in a flour-covered apron that it is all I can do to keep from sweeping her into my arms and kissing the chocolate frosting off her nose.

Then she disconcerts me with a sudden sharp look that goes through me like one of Daddy's Watusi spears. "Why are you so persistent, Augie? Do you think something's going to happen? Are you keeping something from me?"

Muttering something about my duties as caretaker having to do with taking care of things, I escape and spend the rest of the day pondering various ways to out-manuever Toad-Face. The trouble is, you see, heavy planning is not really my bag—which is one reason I retired from cat burgling. Somebody with a brain, like O'Toole, who is so crooked he can hide behind a corkscrew, can think up a dozen plans a minute, but I always went in for direct action. Up the wall, across the roof, into the upstairs bedroom, snatch the sparklers or coins or whatever, and exit to a round of applause, was my shtick; and that it lacked something was brought home to me the last time when the round of applause came from a squad of cops watching me shinny down a drainpipe.

The problem is, if I tell the professor, he'll want to know the whole story. He and Angela will discover I'm an ex-con. He will fire me and she'll tell me never to darken her door again. And T. F. O'Toole will try to turn me into a wall sampler. If I don't tell the professor, he stands to lose a pile of money plus who-knows-what from his priceless collection. I will feel so guilty I'll have to quit and never darken Angela's door again. Either way, Angela's door is not going to be darkened by August J. Augenblick in the future, and I find this more than somewhat disheartening.

Nevertheless, by Thursday night I have made up my mind that I can't let O'Toole give a poke in the eye to two people who have always done right by A. J. Augenblick. An anonymous tip to the local gendarmes might do the trick, I think, so after dark I sneak out of the house and head for the public phone a couple of blocks away, since I don't want to chance anyone overhearing me on the house extension.

I have dropped the coins and am about to dial when I feel a sudden chill. This is caused by a knife blade at my throat, and it prompts me to

hang up and turn around. Slowly, so as not to scrape anything—such as a jugular vein.

“O’Toole!” I exclaim. “What are you doing here? This is only Thursday!”

Toad-Face tips his lucky derby. “Today’s wishing well in the newspaper told me to beware of double-crossers named Augenblick, so I moved things up a day. I also had a stroke of luck in finding a former acquaintance at liberty and talked him into taking your place. You know Nobby the Knife?”

“How do?” says Nobby, though his eyes indicate he doesn’t care at all whether I do or not. He removes the knife from my neck, it having been replaced by O’Toole’s .38 in the small of my back, and we leisurely walk back to the house.

“Then you don’t need me any longer?” I say, hopefully.

“Not so,” says O’Toole. “I have merely recast the script. You may have noticed certain resemblances between you and Nobby? You are about six-one; Nobby is about six-one. You are on the lean side—” he says, a bit enviously, being a stylish stout himself—“and Nobby is on the lean side. You are wearing jeans and a plaid jacket; Nobby is wearing jeans and a plaid jacket. I think it likely that when we capture the professor and his daughter (a part of the plan I neglected to mention, dear boy), I may several times inadvertently refer to Nobby as ‘Augie.’ And since he will be wearing a ski-mask at the time, an unfortunate impression may be left that you are masterminding this operation.”

“I get it. You had it planned this way from the beginning—to make me the fall guy!”

He shrugs modestly. “One does one’s best.”

“You can’t get away with this, Toad-Face!”

He stiffens at the appellation. “Why do you say that?”

I don’t know really, but I have to say something. “Because a black cat just crossed your path, that’s why!”

O’Toole whips out his rabbit’s foot and waves it in the air in a cabalistic pattern. “That takes care of that,” he says, cheerfully. “Anything else?”

I am not sure of all the subsequent events, being unconscious a good bit of the time, but I assume things go about as T. F. expects. When I come to, I am in the trophy room trying to orient myself in the darkness. T. F. is at the wall safe. Nobby has O’Toole’s .38 trained on me.

“Awake, are you?” says Nobby.

"What have you done with Angie and her father?" I demand.

"They won't bother us," says Nobby. "They're stashed in the tower, safe as houses."

"Shut up!" snaps O'Toole, straining to hear tumblers clicking.

There is dead silence, and all at once I am aware that the thumping sound I hear is not just my heartbeat. It sounds like a big drum being struck rhythmically, far away. This is a funny time for the professor to start practicing percussion, I think. And presently we hear a voice over the drumming.

"Toad-Face!" it says. "Toad-Face O'Toole!"

"Call me that one more time, Augenblick, and your next call will be for a hearse!" snarls O'Toole.

"Boss, he didn't say nothin'," says Nobby, in a puzzled tone.

"Toad-Face!" says the voice again, and the drumbeats grow louder.

"Find out where that's coming from!" O'Toole orders. "I can't hear myself think with that racket. Leave him," he says, when Nobby protests that he's guarding me. "He's tied up; he's not going anywhere—yet."

Nobby vanishes in the darkness. I find I am indeed tied up, but not very well, and in spite of a throbbing head my fingers still have a certain skill at picking knots. I work feverishly until I feel something give. Meanwhile, the voice continues calling Toad-Face, who is getting more incensed by the minute. When Nobby reports that he can't locate the source of the drumming, T. F. growls, "Never mind. Augenblick must have spilled the beans to the professor and that babe upstairs. Now they know who I am—and you know what that means! Take care of 'em—now!"

There is a sound that sounds like Nobby running into a door with an "Oof!" just as I find my wrists free. Then he is gone, and I am untying my ankles. Between the drumming and the voice, O'Toole doesn't hear me as I crawl into the hallway and, once there, I sprint up the stairs in Nobby's wake. He is nowhere to be seen and I am hoping I am not too late when, on nearing the door to the tower, I sense rather than see him making his way back toward me. I debate the feasibility of jumping him, but it is against my principles to tangle with a guy packing a .38, even in the dark.

"The key!" he mutters, as he pads by. "Forgot: O'Toole's got the key!"

Since the key he refers to is undoubtedly one of the master set that should be hanging on my belt but isn't, I have almost as big a problem as Nobby in getting into the tower. But there is a window nearby and

sliding it open I see the tower looming against the starlight, just beyond it. To an ex-cat burglar, the rough-cut stones are nearly as good as a ladder, and the window into the tower room, not anticipating any visits from ex-cat burglars, is beautifully unlocked. A moment later I am inside and falling over a body, which emits muffled sounds of protest. My delicate sense of touch indicates that it is not the professor. I fumble elsewhere and locate a gag to loosen.

"You're awfully fresh, whoever you are!" says Angela, and when I identify myself, she adds bitterly that she hopes I am satisfied with this evening's work, and how can I bite the hand that feeds me, and so on.

"Shut up," I tell her tenderly. "Where's your father? Never mind; I've got him."

Professor Hufflemeyer is also abrim with indignation as I untie him, but I cut him off. "Later, professor! In about thirty seconds a guy is coming through that door with a .38 to blow both of you away. Do you suppose you and Angela can manage to get over by the door and trip him up while I smack him with—with whatever this thing is?" Fumbling around in the blackness, my hand has found something hard and heavy—maybe a table lamp, maybe one of the professor's war clubs.

The key is rattling in the door as I speak. The professor and Angela scamper into position. The door opens, and a second later Nobby is on the floor, reduced to a neutral power. Simultaneously, the deafening drumbeats from downstairs hit a crescendo, then stop, and there is a horrible yell that echoes up the stairwell. Then nothing. In silence, I switch on the lights.

"Oh," says Angela, ogling the figure on the floor with the ski-mask over its head. "That's not you, is it? Oh, Augie, I'm so glad!"

There is a whizzing sound and she is in my arms. There are smacking noises and she is kissing me. It is nice.

We make our way downstairs cautiously. The wall safe is open but its contents seem undisturbed. All of Professor Hufflemeyer's artifacts are present and accounted for, including the emerald eye of Bama-Lolo, which glitters in the light as though it knows something. The only sign of O'Toole is his good luck derby on the floor.

"I think you scared him off with those sound effects—that voice and those drums over the intercom," I say at last.

The professor gives me a funny look. "Sound effects? Intercom? Augie,

you know we didn't finish wiring the intercom this afternoon. And how could we have managed any sound effects, tied up in the tower?"

I scratch my head, but this produces no explanation, and the professor goes on, "You did nobly tonight, Augie. I shall certainly see that your parole board gets the whole story of your heroism!"

"M—m—My pup—pup—pup?" I stammer. "Then you know?"

"Why, of course," says Angela. "One of Daddy's friends on the board recommended you."

"And you don't mind that I'm an ex-cat burglar?"

"We thought it might come in handy for cleaning the rain gutters and getting tennis balls off the roof," she says, smiling.

I turn to the professor, still stunned. "Well, sir, I hope this little episode has at least convinced you to install some burglar alarms?"

He grins and strokes his goatee. "N—no, Augie," he says. "I think I'll stick with Bama-Lolo."

He pats the idol with the emerald eye and I give the thing a double-take. It is a trick of the light, of course, plus the strain of events affecting my eyesight. . . .

But the damned thing looks a lot like Toad-Face O'Toole, all of a sudden!



He was alone in the woods and a stranger in those parts. The other men all had guns. . . .

CRAZY OLD MAN

by
MICHAEL
SCOTT
CAIN



When George Clewiston stepped out of the woods into the north end of the clearing, three men were emerging from the woods opposite him. All three aimed rifles at his face.

The leader of the group, a short, barrel-chested man wearing a flannel shirt and a red hunting cap, stepped forward and said, "Right now, there ain't much I'd rather do than put a bullet in you, so if I was you I wouldn't move a muscle."

Clewiston froze, careful to keep his hands in plain sight.

The three men crossed the clearing to him, their rifles still at the ready. "Search him, Carpenter," the leader said.

Clewiston felt sweat break out on his face. Carpenter had cold, remote eyes and as he approached, he studied Clewiston as though he'd seen him many times before and had reason to hate him.

"What's going on here?" Clewiston said. "Look, if you're after my money, fine, take it. I haven't got much, but I don't intend to die over any amount, you know? Just don't hurt me."

"Shut up," the leader said. "Come on, Carpenter, you're acting like this twerp is something to be scared of. Search him."

Carpenter was older than the others, in his mid-sixties probably, and had a deeply tanned, leatherish face. He seemed familiar to Clewiston, but that was impossible; he couldn't have seen him before. The sense of familiarity had to come from the fact that Carpenter was a walking cliché, the model of the super-hunter, his belly straining the fabric of his faded red shirt, his cap low over his face, a bandolier of ammunition strapped across his chest and a knife in his belt.

"Scared? Of this man? You kidding, he thinks we're here to rob him. Look how terrified he is," Carpenter said.

The leader laughed, one short sharp bark. "He should be so lucky."

Clewiston didn't resist when the older man started through his pockets, removed his billfold, and flipped it open. "His name's Clewiston, George Clewiston. He's from Florida." He looked back at the leader. "Kind of off his normal turf, ain't he, Russell?"

"That's right," Russell said. "You're a long way from home, ain't you?" Raising his rifle, he fired three evenly spaced shots in the air. "You know what I just did?"

The shots had frightened Clewiston. He didn't trust himself to speak so he shook his head.

"I just gave the signal. The sheriff's going to be here in about five minutes. You're in more trouble than you can look at."

They couldn't know what he'd done. That couldn't be. Somehow he'd gotten caught up in some horrible mistake here. But he relaxed a little, knowing they weren't going to rob and kill him; all he had to do was wait till the sheriff showed up, talk his way past him, and everything would be all right.

"Yes, sir, Clewiston, you sure picked the wrong place to pull that little stunt."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Where is she?"

"Where's who?"

Russell raised his rifle again. "How about if I just tell the sheriff you tried to make a break for it and I had to slow you down a little?"

"I told you, I don't know what you're talking about."

"You want to play games, buddy?" Russell kept his rifle on Clewiston's chest. "We'll play some games, all right. You tell me where that girl is or I'll shoot you to pieces."

Clewiston's hands shook. The rifle seemed very close to his body.

"Put the rifle down, Russell. We ain't shooting anybody today," a voice called from the edge of the clearing.

Russell looked like a kid who'd been caught watching TV after bedtime. He flushed, kicked his feet at the dirt, and said to the man who approached, "Come on, sheriff, I wasn't going to do anything. I just wanted to make him talk."

The sheriff glanced from Russell to Clewiston. He was a young man, no more than thirty and he worked so hard at displaying strength and control that Clewiston saw he didn't really feel it, didn't think he had it inside him. It was as though he'd been thrust in over his head and fought to keep anyone from seeing how far beyond his depth he was.

About a dozen men, all armed, converged on the clearing. When they saw the sheriff and Clewiston next to each other, they stopped and chatted urgently in little groups.

"His name's Clewiston, sheriff." Carpenter wiped sweat from his brow. "We come on him a few minutes ago, walking along like he was in a real hurry to get away from here."

The sheriff furrowed his brows. "Got some ID, Clewiston?"

He pointed to Carpenter. "He's got my billfold."

The sheriff held out his hand. Reluctantly, as if he were proud of having it in his possession and unwilling to surrender it, Carpenter handed over the wallet.

"George Clewiston," the sheriff said. "You're a long way from Florida, Mr. Clewiston."

"That's what I said," Carpenter announced.

The sheriff ignored him. "How'd you come to be in these woods?"

"I was driving south, down the interstate. Last night I picked up a hitchhiker. She pulled a gun on me and took my car. I saw some lights off in the distance and figured it must be a town. I was heading there for help when these guys stopped me."

"Got his car stolen by a woman," Russell said, cackling. "Ever hear anything so stupid?"

The rest of the men joined in the laughter.

"What'd this woman look like?" the sheriff asked.

"About twenty-five. Short, a little plump, black-haired. She was wearing jeans and a T-shirt and had a backpack on."

"Jeans and a T-shirt?"

"That's right."

"And you couldn't tell she had a gun? Kind of hard to hide a gun under a T-shirt, isn't it?"

"She must have had it in the backpack. She took it off when she got in the car, held it in her lap, and the next thing I knew there was a gun in my face."

"You report the car stolen?"

"I told you, I was on my way for help when these guys came along."

The sheriff held up the billfold. "Registration in here?"

He shook his head. "It's in the car."

"My name's Morgan, Mr. Clewiston. Bob Morgan. I'm sympathetic to your problem, but right now I just don't have time to deal with it. We got a real problem of our own here. How about you just stick with us for a while? We'll fix you up later."

Clewiston studied Morgan's face. From the way the sheriff glanced down at the ground when he spoke, refusing to meet his eyes, Clewiston knew he thought he was lying.

"Sure," he said. "What's going on here, anyway?"

"As if you didn't know," Russell said sharply.

"That's enough, Russell," Morgan said without facing him. "Fact is, Mr. Clewiston, a girl disappeared last night. A little sixteen-year-old girl started home from the movies by herself and never got there. It's a four block walk from her house to the theater, but she never made it."

"You figure something happened to her?" It was a stupid thing to say, he realized after the words were out. Would they be tromping the woods with guns if they didn't?

"Fact is," Morgan looked at him curiously, as though he waited for

Clewiston to say something inadvertently that would confirm his guilt, "I don't know what to think. But until we know something, I can't do a thing about your problem."

"Look, sheriff, the girl who stole my car's probably a couple of hundred miles away already. If you could just alert the state police . . ."

"Later," he said sharply. "We got us another girl to find first."

"Okay, I can wait. But for how long? The way you describe it, you don't even know she's in these woods."

"There's nothing on the other side of town but farms. It's flat and open. You go north or south and it's all flat lands and developments. We got men looking in those areas too. But if something did happen to her—I'm not saying anything did and I hope to hell it didn't—but if it did, it would happen out here."

"Maybe she just ran away."

"Jeannie Morrison wouldn't do that. She's a sweet kid, very devoted to her family, never caused anybody a minute's trouble. She didn't have any cause to run away and even if she did, she wouldn't handle it that way." Turning to his posse, he said, "Okay, let's move out again. We got work to do." As he watched the men disperse, he said, "How 'bout you sticking close to me, Clewiston?"

Clewiston nodded.

As they stomped through the brush, Clewiston hoped the girl was all right. Any minute now, he figured, somebody would come out from town and tell them she'd come home from spending the night with a friend or she'd called from out of town or something. When that happened, he could bluff his way out of this, but time had to be considered; the longer he spent out here walking around with a bunch of armed men, the better the chance that some curious cop was going to discover an abandoned car with a trunk full of drugs, freshly stolen from the pharmaceutical house a few miles north of town. The car was stolen, too, and they'd find his prints all over it.

He could still pull this off and get out of here, but only if the girl were quickly found. As long as the sheriff had his attention tied up by Jeannie Morrison, as long as there was a chance she was in trouble, he wasn't going to let Clewiston out of his sight.

As each trail they walked turned colder and as each hour passed, the sheriff flashed him colder looks, answered his questions in brief monosyllables. As the chances of finding her safe receded one by one, Clew-

iston's guilt, in the sheriff's eyes, became more of a certainty. He could see conviction grow in Morgan's face and several times he wanted to break and run, but he couldn't. These guys wouldn't let him get ten yards.

Three spaced shots came from the west. The sheriff turned and looked in that direction. "Maybe this is it, Clewiston. Let's go."

They headed slowly toward the source of the shots, the sheriff walking behind as if he really didn't want to get there, as if he dreaded what he would discover. When they entered a small clearing by a creek, Russell stepped out from behind a tree, his rifle leveled at Clewiston's chest.

"I'm going to kill you right here."

The sheriff said, "Put it down, Russell."

"Better stay out of this, sheriff. What he's done, he doesn't deserve to live."

"That isn't our decision to make. Put the rifle down."

Russell sighted along the barrel, his cheek resting on the stock. The hole in the end of the barrel looked huge to Clewiston, so big he felt he could have stuck his head into it. Helplessly he watched the hole, waiting for it to fill with fire.

"Put it down, Russell. Now."

"Sheriff . . ."

"This man gets due process, just like you or I would. If you don't put that gun down, I'll shoot you myself."

Reluctantly, Russell lowered the rifle. The sheriff's sigh filled the air and the other men looked disappointed.

"All right," the sheriff said. "Let's see what you found."

"She's over there. In the trees on the other side of the creek."

Clewiston realized with a start that the sheriff was waiting for him to lead the way. From the looks on the men's faces, he knew they'd already made up their minds; whatever had happened beyond those trees, they figured he'd made it happen.

When Clewiston didn't step out, the sheriff gave him a push. "Let's go take a look."

Jeannie Morrison lay between two trees, a bullet hole in her back. The body sprawled weirdly, the girl's arms flung in unnatural positions, a few leaves on the legs of her jeans.

Morgan shook his head sadly. "Who's got the radio?"

"I got it, sheriff," a man said, stepping up.

"Call the medical examiner. Tell him where we are and get him out here. You touch the body, Russell?"

"Not me. I ain't touching no dead person."

The sheriff walked slowly over to the girl and turned her over. Her face was young, not even old enough to seem fully formed yet, showing promises of beauty. The skin was smooth and tanned and her eyes were closed as if in sleep. She looked calm, peaceful.

Clewiston gasped. "I know this girl," he blurted out.

"What did you say?"

"I meant she looked familiar, that's all. Looks like a girl that lives on my block back home."

"Where's the gun, Clewiston?"

"What gun? I don't have a gun."

"I know you don't have one now. You wouldn't keep a murder weapon. Where'd you dump it?"

"I didn't do this, sheriff."

"Let's do him in right now," Russell shouted. "Right here and now."

"Shut up, Russell."

"I'm telling you, sheriff. I had nothing to do with this."

"Clewiston, you didn't say the girl looked familiar. You said you *knew* her. I want to know how you knew her because I knew her too and I know Jeannie Morrison wasn't the type to go running off into the woods with just anybody. How'd you get her out here?"

"I didn't. I swear to God I didn't do this thing."

"Then why'd you say you knew the girl?"

"I thought I'd seen her before, maybe. I don't know."

But now he remembered. He had seen her once before. Late last night, when he'd been stealing a car in the town square—the car he intended to use to haul the drugs back home, the car that was broken down out on the highway—he'd seen a pickup truck go by. Hiding down in the seat from its headlights, he'd glanced up and had noticed this girl, Jeannie Morrison, in the passenger's seat. He'd seen the driver, too. Quickly he looked around, surveying these faces. His eyes closed on the older man's face, Carpenter. He'd been the driver. Carpenter looked back at him, his eyes curious, intense.

"Sheriff . . ."

"What?"

He shook his head. "Nothing. Never mind. It's just that I'm innocent, that's all."

He saw the look of relief flood over Carpenter's face.

That old man had been with the girl last night, he knew that as well as he knew the alphabet. But he also knew he couldn't say anything about it. What was he supposed to do, confess to breaking and entering, burglary, and grand theft auto to prove he wasn't a murderer? What good would that do? Besides, the sheriff already had him convicted of the murder so if he knew about the other things, he'd be even more convinced of his guilt. No, Clewiston wasn't going to be able to use the truth to get out of this.

A short man with torn overalls stepped up to him and shoved his shotgun into his belly. Clewiston recoiled from the feel of cold steel. "I'm with Russell, sheriff. We ought to finish him right here."

"Yeah," Russell shouted. "Ain't that right, boys?"

"Right!"

"Shoot him."

"Let's get it over with!"

"I'm telling you," the sheriff said, "there isn't going to be any of that."

"Then you better not turn your back on him or us."

"This man goes to prison." The sheriff touched his gunbelt. "We don't lynch people around here."

"By God, this time we ought to," Russell said. "We ought to just put this pervert away right now."

The sheriff looked around. "Carpenter?"

"Yeah?" He scratched at a fresh bite on his cheek.

"I don't see you crying out for a lynching. You want to kill him on the spot too?"

Carpenter looked at Clewiston for a long time. "I want him to pay for what he did. I don't much care how."

The sheriff nodded. "Take him back to town for me. Lock him up and keep him safe till I get there. Can you do that?"

"Sure." Carpenter smiled.

Clewiston's hands shook when he saw that smile. He started to speak but the faces of the men stopped him.

"Sheriff?" Carpenter said.

"Yeah?"

"If he tries to get away?"

"See that he doesn't."

As they walked out of the camp, Russell called out, "Take him out and kill him."

"Wish I could," Carpenter shrugged.

They walked for half a mile or so. The afternoon sun was hot and sweat broke out on Clewiston's forehead. His shirt was stained. He was relieved when Carpenter sighed and sat down on a rock, his rifle across his knees.

"Well, son, you got yourself some big trouble."

Clewiston wiped off his face. "I guess."

"Jeannie Morrison was a real good kid. People ain't going to like what you did."

"But you and I both know I didn't do it."

"What are you talking about?"

"I saw you with her. You know that."

"It was you in Mort Willis's car, was it?"

"Yeah. But one thing you ought to know: it's no business of mine what happened between you and that girl."

"I'd just love it if you tried to make a break."

"Look, you've got nothing to fear from me."

"Car thief, huh?"

"That's right."

"Well, you sure messed up last night. Mort Willis never did take care of his car worth a damn. Reckon it's out on the highway somewhere, broke down? That why you was in the woods?"

"That's right." He tried to make it sound light. "So if I try to make trouble for you, I'm just making trouble for myself."

"That ain't how I see it."

"But that's the way it is."

"Nope, way I see it is you're going to try to make a deal. You're going to try to trade me for a reduction in the charges, maybe a little probation even. A sneaky car thief'll do anything to save his own skin."

"Look, you don't have to worry about that. They're not about to reduce the charges on me. Not after they find that car full of stolen drugs."

"Drug running, too. My, my, my. You are a busy boy, ain't you? What'd you do, rip off the pharmaceutical company?"

"That's what I did, all right."

"And you stole a car on top of that? You either got a lot of grit or no sense at all, son."

He shrugged. "Extra payday. I fly into a place, rip off my target, and steal a car to drive home. Sell the car and the stuff when I get there."

"A real pro, huh?"

"It's a living." He shrugged again. "So you see you got nothing to fear from me."

"That's where you're wrong, son. You move too quick for an old country boy like me. I don't think I can trust you as far as I can reach. No, son, what I figure is they're going to think that Jeannie Morrison saw you steal that car, caught you right in the act, so you brought her out here and killed her."

"You're going to shoot me?"

"There's an old quarry up ahead. Tricky going. Lots of holes and breaks in the ground from the quarrying, lots of places to hide. You're going to try to overpower an old man like me, make a break for it, and I'm going to be forced to shoot you." He stood and motioned Clewiston to his feet with the barrel of the gun. "Let's move, son."

"You don't need to do this. I swear, I'm not going to talk. All I want is to get out of here."

As he spoke, he remembered the girl, how she looked, how innocent she appeared. How could this man snuff out a life like that?

"It's more like what I want that counts, son. Let me tell you something. You know how they're saying what a sweet little thing Jeannie Morrison was? Well, that sweet young thing has been driving me crazy for years now, teasing me, flirting with me like some little tramp. And when I finally got her in my truck and tried to get her to do something about it, she called me a dirty old man and slapped me. Then she tried to run off. You think I'm going to jail over a little tramp like that? No way. No way at all."

His eyes flashed and his voice grew distorted, as if he were speaking despite himself, despite his own will.

"How much is a man supposed to take? I ask you that. How long is a man supposed to see that little tramp walking around, looking at him all the time like he's some prime hunk of beef, and then spitting on him when he makes a move. Would you take that? Would you put up with it for a minute?"

He was unbalanced. Clewiston saw that now. Some poor little girl had seemed to be someone else entirely in his vision and had paid the price for not being what he'd seen her as. And now Clewiston was going to pay

for it too. He felt a wave of sympathy for the old man, a greater wave for Jeannie Morrison. For himself he felt only fear.

"Okay, she did you wrong," he said. "But I haven't. There's no need to kill me."

"No." The old man's eyes hardened. "You haven't done me no wrong. But you will. I just give you a chance, you will."

They broke out of the woods into a large area that had been cleared by bulldozers. Thirty yards away, a huge pit loomed. Out in the center of it, Clewiston could see earth moving equipment.

"Tell you what, son: why don't you step right over there by that ridge?"

He watched Carpenter raise the rifle. "Listen . . ."

"Just get over there, son."

Clewiston held his hands out in front of him as if to protect himself, but stopped, his mouth open. Slowly, he turned and walked to the edge. He moved slowly, having trouble with his steps because his feet felt far away, almost as though they had no connection to him at all. He shivered as he turned to face Carpenter.

The old man smiled and raised his rifle. When he saw the fear in Clewiston's face, he laughed softly, and very slowly, with deliberate care, caution so excessive that Clewiston knew he was putting on a performance, lowered the rifle, stepped to his right, and aimed again. Shaking his head as though the angle weren't quite right, he stepped again to the right. Clewiston saw the crack in the earth then and held his breath, willing the man to take one more step.

Carpenter raised the rifle once more and shifted his footing. The earth opened under his feet and he screamed, dropping the rifle, as he fell into the hole the shifting earth had made.

Clewiston let his breath out, feeling his tensed chest and back muscles let go, as though they couldn't hold him upright any more. When he was breathing normally, he picked up the rifle and looked down into the pit. Carpenter lay beneath a pile of dirt and rock, twenty feet down, his arm bent in the wrong direction. His eyes were wide with pain, his mouth curled in an ugly grimace.

"My leg's broken," he cried. "Arm too. I can't move."

Clewiston grinned.

"You got to help me, son. You can't leave me here to die."

"Can't I? All I have to do is walk away and I'm home free."

"You can't do that. You ain't a murderer."

"You think I'm going to jail for a crazy old man like you? Good luck, Carpenter. Be sure to tell them what happened, okay?"

Carpenter's shouts filled his head as he walked away. He ignored them, but couldn't help hearing him once more telling him he wasn't a murderer. He lifted a tree limb out of his way and walked into the woods, seeing Jeannie Morrison's face in his mind, seeing that young face that hadn't even lost its freckles yet.

He was going to spend the rest of his life being blamed for killing her, was going to live with the knowledge that these people were blaming him for something that crazy old man had done. And that crazy old man had been right; he wasn't a murderer. A thief, yes, and a very good one, but a murderer, a man who snuffed out little girls? No. That required a leap he couldn't make and couldn't stand having anybody think he had made.

Silently he cursed and turned around and walked back to the clearing. Maybe he could make a deal after all. And even if he couldn't, he'd still survive it. Firing three evenly spaced shots into the air, he sat down on a log to wait for the sheriff.

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It wasn't just a trick. Miss Sampson really could endure a five thousand volt charge, but few people knew how. . . .

THE HUMAN DYNAMO



by

J.M. KELLY

It was the hottest August in Junction County in twelve years and the first murder in fifteen. The sun knocking on the roof of my trailer had me up in a lawn chair under a shade tree by eight, which was early for me—Sammy Slade's Sideshow didn't get started until around three. It was too hot for coffee so I was sipping some iced tea and trying to keep from waking up too quickly when the sheriff arrived.

Sheriff Stoner had a big Adam's apple and enough smiles and sympathy

fossilized into his leathery face to make you trust him as soon as you saw him. I was the only one stirring on the fair grounds except for the Firemen's Ladies Auxiliary setting up their bake sale, so the sheriff approached me and asked if I knew where he could find the Human Dynamo.

"She's still sleeping, far as I know," I said. "Anything I can do for you?" Besides being the Emcee, Juggler, Elephant-skinned Man and assistant bookkeeper, I was the road manager for Sammy Slade's. That made me the unofficial buffer between our people and the locals.

"Just take me to her, son. We're here to place her under arrest. For murder." By "we" he meant himself and a crewcut younger man whom he introduced as Deputy Brown. The deputy had basset hound eyes set in a blank face. He cradled a twelve-gauge shotgun in his arms and didn't say a word.

The Human Dynamo's real name was Darleen Sampson. She was in her mid-thirties, plump but not fat, and a lady in the old sense. She was the only member of the show who didn't have to double up on roles. She was the Human Dynamo and nothing else. About a dozen times an evening she sat in an awful-looking chair and let five thousand volts of electricity pass through her body. To prove the juice was really there, I'd hand her a fluorescent bulb that would glow in her hands. I'd also touch her skin with kerosene-soaked wands like the Fire Eater used. These were wrapped with copper wire, which set off sparks from the electricity and ignited the flame. A big point in her show was when she'd light one with her tongue.

Off stage Darleen was quiet, almost shy for a carny. She kept to herself, but she could be charming, too. Rainy afternoons, she could keep us all in stitches for hours with her dry humor. And gentle? She kept a white angora cat which she treated just like it was royalty. And when the roustabouts would be cursing up a storm trying to get some tangled gear erected in the wind, the Human Dynamo would turn her head and seem to shut her ears to the foul language. Murder? I was waiting for the punch line.

"What seems to be the problem, sheriff?"

"Problem's Anse Lewis. Owns a sawmill out on Lower Mountain Road. Killed last night. Your Human Dynamo's the last one seen with him. Found a handkerchief identified as hers at the scene."

"Well, I'm sure she'd be happy to help you with your investigation.

But as for murder, there's no chance Darleen could be involved. She's not like that. How was this Lewis killed?"

"Electrocution."

I was sweating from more than the heat as we marched over to Darleen's trailer behind the midway. The sun was white hot and I had a bad feeling in my gut.

I knocked on Darleen's door and she answered right away. I suggested to the sheriff that we all go over and sit down in the bingo tent where at least we'd be out of the sun.

Darleen already had her face on. I'd never seen her without it. It was one of her trademarks, that face. Its features were simple enough. It was a round, slightly pudgy face, maybe with larger than average eyes. But she always had on very heavy make-up: inked lashes, pencilled brows, powdered cheeks and rouged lips, almost a china doll's face. And she wore an expression like a sphinx, a sort of half-smile on her lips, eyes that never blinked, and a firm jaw that rarely moved. In my opinion, it was that face, even more than the electricity or her satiny costume, that was the key to her act. Men, women, and children would all be captivated by that face. She looked them square in the eyes as if she were looking at them from a world they'd visited only in their dreams.

As the sheriff related the facts of the murder, the Human Dynamo kept her face intact, just as she did when the five thousand volts were hitting her. I could see the sheriff studying her, trying to read some reaction. He seemed almost as impressed by her as our paying customers were.

"Seems Anse was down here yesterday evening for the hog judging. He raises Chester Whites and had a sow in the show. Afterward, he ate at the Grange Chicken Barbecue and took in the fair. During the evening, he met up with Preacher Kane and Red Malley and they passed some time at the Under and Over table. Being a week night, things were a little slow. Anse, preacher, Red, and a couple of other boys got a poker game going right here after the bingo shut down at ten. Somebody come up with a few beers and they were having a friendly game for an hour or so. Then your Rasputin and a fellow runs the chair swing sat in and two of the locals dropped out. Finally, Miss Dynamo, here, showed up and she took a hand. Round about one thirty, the game broke up. Anse and Miss Dynamo went off together, toward the parking lot.

"Next thing, I'm getting a call from Agnes Ritter, Anse's housekeeper. Anse was widowed as a young man and never remarried. Agnes has a

room in his house downstairs. She's been with him near to thirty years. Anyway, this is about quarter to three. Agnes is almost hysterical. The electricity is off, she's heard some funny noises, and she can't raise Anse yelling. She's afraid to leave her room. I get dressed and drive over there. Sure enough, the lights are out. I look around with my flashlight. There's Anse in his bathtub upstairs. Dead. He's half dressed and there's a bump on his head the size of a golf ball. An electric heater was in the water with him. It killed him before the short circuit blew the main fuse."

Darleen never once took her eyes off the sheriff. Her face was as rigid as ice.

"Any chance of an accident?" I asked.

"We pretty much ruled it out. First, why would a man have an electric heater perched on the edge of his bathtub the hottest night of the year? Second, the bump was on his forehead, not on the back as if he'd fell. Third, we found a flatiron that Anse used for a doorstop on the floor of the bathroom. Coroner's checking it for blood now, but it seems likely it was what raised that egg on his head. Right beside it, we found this." He pulled out a lavender and blue satin handkerchief. "This yours?" he asked Darleen.

Darleen nodded. The sheriff asked her to give her version of the evening. But first, he carefully advised her of her rights, reading the warning from a little card he had in his wallet. He asked her if she wanted a lawyer.

"Joe can act as my lawyer," she said. I'm Joe.

"You a lawyer?" Sheriff Stoner asked. His eyes traced with narrow suspicion my shaggy head of hair, my Fu Manchu mustache, the gold pin in my ear, and the coiled serpent tattooed on my bicep.

As a matter of fact, I am a lawyer. A few years back, I was an assistant D.A. with a prosecutor's office. But the desk work gave me itchy feet after a while. One spring morning I closed out my bank account, bought an old Ford, and set out to see the country. After a few months, the sightseeing wore kind of thin, and so did my finances. I began to look for work. I met Sammy Slade in a tavern in Utica one night and we fell to talking. Turned out he was looking for another man for one of his side-shows—he had three units travelling with different carnival groups around the East and Midwest. What could I do? I said I could juggle some—I'd learned in college—and could talk a pretty good line of patter—I'd picked

that up in law school. He asked, could I lie on a bed of nails? I said, well, why not? I got the job.

The Sammy Slade Sideshow was presented in a medium-sized tent with a stage at either end. Shows were continuous. You paid your dollar and stayed until the acts started to repeat or until you were bored. We'd direct the customers back and forth from one stage to the other so we could be setting up for one act while another was going on.

We put on a good show, I think. There was Eddie, the Magician and Sword Swallower, who was called Rasputin because of his black beard and thick eyebrows. Frank served as the Fire Eater and, being naturally double-jointed, as Mr. Pretzel the Contortionist. His wife, Joyce, was the Magician's Helper and also did good bird imitations. One night she was sawed in half twenty-two times, a record. And there was Albert, a midget who did acrobatics while reciting a string of one-line gags. When the hecklers started to get bad, I'd give Albert a sign and he'd shut them down cold with ferocious wisecracks.

Since I was bottom man in seniority, I was awarded the Elephant-skinned Man mantle. They say if you lower yourself onto all the nails at once it doesn't hurt. But it took me awhile to get used to it. The first few weeks, I'd be up all night with a burning sensation all across my shoulderblades.

We all got on well together, made a good team, and had fun. Only the Contortionist was a bit taciturn at times. Frank would go for days without speaking to anyone, including his wife.

We weren't out to fool the hicks. The idea of the gullible rube is a myth. Your average New England farmer is a shrewd character. Only, he spends a lot of time looking at the weather and he likes to have some diversion now and then. We try to give them a good show. We kid them, sure. And they kid us. We get them laughing. We show them something they don't see every day. We surprise them. And everybody has fun.

But this was bad business. The Human Dynamo was an important part of the show. She was memorable. And she was no faker, either. We said five thousand volts and that's what it was. I won't give away the secret of how she did it, except to say that it has to do with the frequency of the cycles of the current.

"I've got nothing to hide, sheriff," she began. "I did strike up an acquaintance with Mr. Lewis last evening. And I'm terribly saddened to hear that he is deceased. I joined Eddie and Jake and Mr. Lewis, Mr.

Kane—or Reverend Kane, I should say—and Mr. Malley for a few games of draw poker here. When the game broke up, Mr. Lewis mentioned that his Maggie'd be tired of waiting all this time. Why didn't you invite your wife to have a beer with us? I asked. He laughed. Maggie was his sow, he said. She'd just won second prize for Chester Whites. I asked him if I could see her. I used to raise show pigs myself when I was a girl in Iowa. So we went down to the parking lot and had a look at Maggie. I admired her to the sky—she's really a lovely hog.

"As Mr. Lewis was closing the trailer, he cut his finger. It wasn't bad, but it bled terribly. I told him to take my handkerchief to wrap it in, as I had plenty. He didn't want to, but he was wearing a new, light-colored suit, so I convinced him. He drove off and then I went to bed. He was a nice man."

No one, unfortunately, had seen Darleen enter her trailer. No one had seen Lewis driving home alone. That's how matters stood.

The sheriff didn't have many questions for Darleen. I could tell he was impressed by her sincerity and composure. Apologetically, he told her that Deputy Brown would have to take her in to the lock-up in his office, under suspicion of murder, at least until the investigation could turn up something more on the case. The silent deputy motioned her toward his car with a jerk of his head.

"So what happens now, sheriff?" I asked.

"For the moment, nothing. County attorney's up to the state capital and won't be back till tonight. I haven't had much experience with this kind of an investigation. I'm planning to leave it up to him."

"You haven't had experience with murder, sheriff, but you have had experience with people, I'll bet. You don't really think Darleen killed that man, do you?"

"No, frankly, I don't. But there's evidence against her and right now she's the only suspect we've got."

"Well, I don't mean to pry, but I handled a good few murder cases before I took up my current profession," I said. "How about you and I digging into this before the county attorney gets back? Just collect the facts before they're cold. Can't hurt, can it?"

He stared at me as if he were reading some kind of fine print in my eyes. Then he agreed. He told me he'd have all the principal witnesses in his office in an hour.

It was too hot to wear a suit, even if I'd still had one. So I borrowed

a white shirt from Frank, combed my hair, and drove into town. The sheriff's office was attached to the town library.

Stoner's office was cramped and a fan wasn't doing much more than turning over stale air. He had a big pitcher of ice water on his desk.

Agnes Ritter, Lewis's housekeeper, came in first. She was a small, white-haired woman. Her eyes were red from crying.

"I didn't hear anything," she told the sheriff, "because I had my hearing aid out. I wasn't able to sleep and I was sitting in bed reading an Agatha Christie when suddenly, poof, everything went dark. It took me a minute to find my hearing aid. When I got it in, I heard footsteps on the stairs. I thought it was Mr. Lewis. I called out. For a moment there was silence. Then more steps and the front door slammed. That's when I called you."

"And you said there was some money missing, Agnes?"

"Yes. I know Mr. Lewis keeps all his cash in the top drawer of his bureau. I don't know how much was there, but I've warned him about keeping too much around. This morning I looked and there was nothing there and nothing in his pants pockets either."

"Was it ordinary for Mr. Lewis to take a bath so late?"

"When it was hot. He'd take a cool bath and it'd help him to sleep."

"You have any questions, Joe?" The sheriff introduced me.

"Could you tell anything from the sound of the footsteps, Miss Ritter? Was it a man or a woman?"

"I couldn't really say. I was in the back, see, so all I heard was the sound."

"And how much would you say Mr. Lewis weighed, about?"

"Oh, he was hefty, all right. I'd say at least two hundred. He always said it was my cooking that . . ." She bent her head in a fit of sobbing. The sheriff got up and helped her out and led the next witness in.

Red Malley was a stocky man of forty with a wide-open face and a dusting of freckles. His nickname could have referred to either his hair or his nose. He smiled as he greeted the sheriff and shook hands with me. Then he let his face sink back into the appropriate somber grief over the loss of his friend.

Red gave the same account of the evening as the sheriff had given me. He and Anse and Preacher Kane had met up accidentally at the barbecue. There had been no problems all evening, no fights, no disagreements. Anse and the preacher hadn't drunk more than two beers apiece while

playing cards. Red hadn't had anything. The stakes in the game weren't excessively high, though they'd gotten higher as the evening went on.

"My luck was running about like it usually does, so I was probably the biggest loser."

"What'd you part company with, Red?" Stoner asked.

"Oh, I'd say seventy, eighty."

"Quite a lot to lose for you, ain't it?"

"That's true, sheriff. I wished I hadn't ever played."

"Was Lewis a winner?" I asked.

"I think he was. He did all right, especially at the end. First preacher was winning, then Anse."

"You must have been a little sore about losing, weren't you?" I continued.

"No. What do you mean?"

"I mean maybe you decided to talk over your losses with Lewis after the game. Maybe things got a little heated. Words were exchanged. Tempers flared. Something happened."

I meant to provoke him. Instead, he cringed. His eyes went moist and he had a hard time controlling his lower lip.

"No. No. That didn't happen. Did it, sheriff? I wouldn't. No. Anse and me were buddies. I couldn't have . . ."

"Sure, Red. Tell me, did you go right home after the game broke up?"

"Me? Why no, I didn't. I was feeling sort of restless and hungry so I drove out to the Maple Diner, the all-night one out on Route 22. Had a cup of coffee and some pie."

"People see you there?"

"Well, the waitress did. What's her name? Gloria?"

"Okay, I guess that'll be all. Thanks for taking the time, Red. You've been a help."

"You don't think, sheriff, that I, that it was me that . . ."

"You're okay, Red. Nothing to worry about."

The man got up and went out, his head lowered.

"Red had a few run-ins with the law years back," Sheriff Stoner said. "Spent some time in jail. He was a mean drunk. Whenever he'd have a few he'd fly off the handle and start fighting and busting things up. A lot of times, he didn't remember a thing about it the next day. He's been on the wagon for two years now, but he's still sensitive about it. If he

wasn't drinking last night, it's all right. If he was, it'd make me wonder. In any case, we'll check with this Gloria, just to be sure."

Stoner called Preacher Kane into the office. He was a big man with a square face and a neck that overflowed the collar of his shirt. He had on a navy summer suit with a little shine to its elbows and cuffs. His hair was combed up into a stiff wave. His eyes were small and set close to his nose. The sonorous baritone of his voice and the extravagant gestures he used gave an oratorical quality to everything he said.

"Sheriff. Fine warm day."

"Sit down, preacher. I want to ask you a few questions about last night, about Anse Lewis."

"May he rest in peace." He dropped his head as far as his triple chin would allow him.

"Why don't you just tell me, in your own words, exactly what happened from the time you met Anse last evening till the last time you saw him?"

"Well, I'd just gotten to the fair, sheriff, when I ran into Anse over by the livestock barn. He was getting finished showing his sow and he graciously invited me to dine with him at the Grange Barbecue. I'm sure you've tasted the succulent repast which that worthy organization offers each year, sheriff. It must be the sauce they put on the chicken that makes it so . . ."

"I've eaten it, preacher. What happened afterward?"

"Let's see. We met up with Red Malley at the barbecue. Then the three of us toured the fair together. It was a pleasant evening and the entire populace seemed in a jovial mood. Around about ten thirty or eleven we were resting our feet in the bingo tent. Someone suggested that a friendly game of cards would pass the time most enjoyably. The three of us and two other gentlemen sat playing for an hour or so, then we were joined by two of those carnival people. One of them called himself Rasputin—an atrocious-looking, hairy young man. Finally, a woman joined us. She was with one of those girly shows or freak shows or something. We played for a while longer, but this woman insisted on leering at all the men at the table. Finally, I had had enough of that and announced that I would be leaving. The other men continued playing. Red and Anse joined me, but then, to my extreme consternation, Anse said good night and went off with that woman. I wish I could say he lived to regret it."

"Did you boys go to the side show earlier, or have any contact with any of the carnival people?"

"No. We prefer to patronize local charity games rather than the amusements offered by outsiders."

"Could I ask a question, sheriff?" I said.

The sheriff introduced me. Preacher Kane sighted down a prominent hooked nose and jiggled his eyebrows in disapproval.

"Who suggested playing cards, preacher?"

"Why, I don't remember. We all decided on it."

"But who brought it up in the first place?"

"I think, yes, I believe that it might have been me. It was hot and the carnival was beginning to close down. A little harmless amusement . . ."

"Where is your church located?"

"I have no permanent church at the moment. My congregation is scattered across several counties. I travel to them and we hold services in the homes of members."

"Mr. Lewis was a member?"

"He was."

"You were ordained by . . . ?"

"I answered a calling."

"You're not an ordained minister then? Do you hold a job other than preaching?"

"As a matter of fact, I don't. The generosity of my congregation allows me to devote all of my time to their needs. But I really don't see, sheriff . . ."

"Who supplied the cards for that poker game, preacher? Was it you?"

"I don't remember. Now, I object to the insinuations that . . ."

"That's all I have to ask at the moment, sheriff. I think, though, that we might get to the bottom of this more quickly if the preacher were to stay while we question the next witness."

"Can you stick around for a few minutes, preacher?"

The preacher nodded. Perspiration was beading on his forehead. But then, it was very hot.

Eddie, or Rasputin as he was called, came in and sat down opposite the preacher. Except for his eyes and two small patches of cheekbone, his entire face was a fierce tangle of curly black hair. He looked like a terror but was actually a sweet guy.

"Eddie," I began, "you were playing cards last night in the bingo tent with a group of people, correct?"

"That's right, Joe."

"What was the game?"

"Dealer's choice. Mostly draw poker, some stud. Jake, the fellow who runs the chair swing, he likes to play stud."

"Who supplied the cards for the game?"

"I wouldn't know. They were already playing when we sat in."

"How did the game go?"

"Started out, we were playing maximum two-dollar bump. I won a little, Jake was doing okay, and that fellow Anse was winning. After awhile, we decided to raise it to five dollars a bump limit. The pots began to get pretty substantial then, and the preacher, here, began to do all right."

"How substantial?"

"Maybe forty, fifty dollars a crack. I was getting toasted and thinking of dropping out. Preacher was raking it in. Then the preacher's luck seemed to change. Anse began to win again. Over all, I suppose that Anse won more than anybody else. But I guess his luck didn't hold. Anyway, the local boys decided to call it a night about one thirty. Jake and I and another fellow stayed up a while longer playing cut-throat rummy."

"Was the game on the up and up?"

"I would have thought it was. But when you alerted me this morning, I took a close look at the cards. What do you know, but there's some real smooth line work done on them."

"Line work?" the sheriff asked.

"Here, I'll show you," Eddie said, drawing a pack of cards from his pocket. "See this blue design printed on the back of the card? Well, somebody's taken a pen and drawn in an extra line on each corner—worked it right into the design so you'd never notice it if you weren't looking for it. Draw a card out of there, sheriff, and show it to me face down."

The sheriff did so.

"Eight of clubs."

"That proves nothing!" the preacher broke in. "The man's a professional magician."

"Proves nothing about what, preacher?" asked the sheriff.

The preacher was at a loss.

"Let me explain it as I see it, sheriff," I said. "Things are starting to

add up. First off, I don't think Lewis was knocked out in his bath. Why would a man be taking a bath with half his clothes still on? More likely, he was beamed while he was still getting undressed, tossed into the water that he had running, and the heater thrown in after him.

"Now, Lewis was a big man. Hardly likely that a woman could have lifted him up and dropped him unconscious in the tub. That would have taken another big man.

"So let's do some speculating. Say it was the preacher who introduced the marked deck—he claims he can't recall, but I'm sure some of the other players will have better memories. Maybe his congregation hasn't been as generous as he would like and he has to do some moonlighting. Cheating at cards's a funny way for a preacher to earn extra pocket money, you might say. And maybe Lewis would have thought so too. Let's say he wised up to the trick and, just to test it out, started using the preacher's line work against him. When the preacher figured what was going on he panicked. He dropped out of the game and forgot to take his cards. Actually, he was too interested in making sure Lewis didn't expose him. He followed Lewis home and arrived just as he was running his bath. Lewis was an honest man. He told preacher he was planning to return the money and reveal him as a card sharp. They argued. Preacher saw his whole show going down the drain if he was shown up. So he grabbed the flatiron and swung. He threw Anse in the bathtub, probably, with the idea of making it look like an accident. But he couldn't resist grabbing Lewis's money, either. Maybe Anse had left the drawer open when he deposited his night's winnings. Finally, with the lights doused, preacher really got scared and ran out."

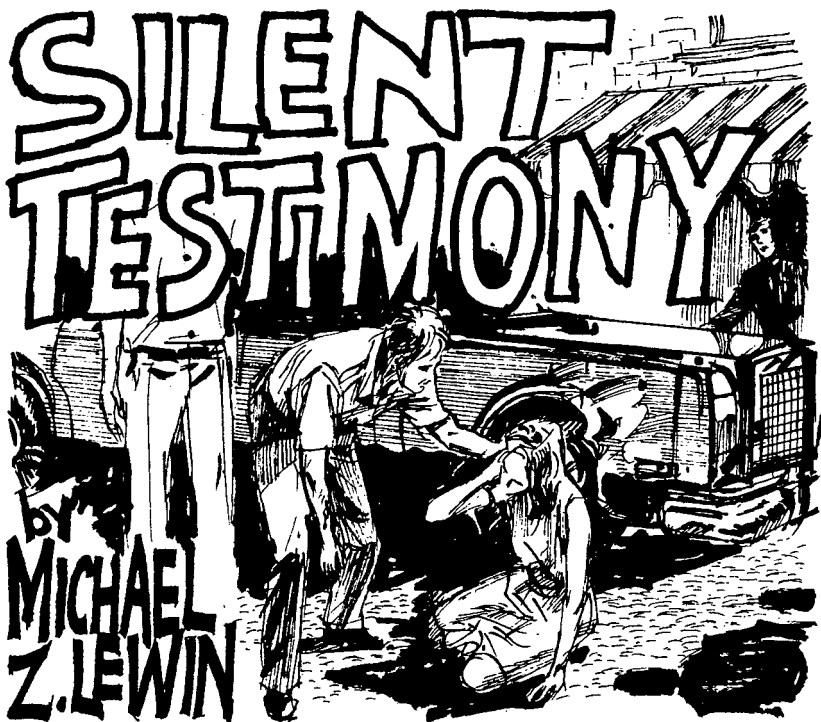
As if to illustrate this last remark, the preacher, whose chins had been trembling during my little speech, bolted and swung open the office door.

Deputy Brown stood right outside. He seemed to be examining a smudge on the gleaming barrel of his shotgun. He looked up.

"Going somewheres?" he asked. It was the only time I ever heard him speak.



If she had another child like him, Bob Brown's mother said, it would kill her. . . .



Bob Brown was hardly the first man to find the wife he had chosen becoming a hindrance instead of a helpmate.

But unlike most men he was not about to resign himself to having his hopes wash away as his life ran out, like a sand castle when the tide comes in, and with the same inevitability. This was not the way he worked. Call him determined or call him obsessive, but when he'd decided what he

wanted he made it happen. And if making his plans work out took murder, then so be it.

Call it determination when it appears in childhood. Bob Brown showed it from the first times in his life he was able to indicate "character." A more inconsolable baby, crying for what it wanted, you couldn't have found. He was enough to make his mother stop her quest for feminine companionship in the family. "The others were different," she said. "If I had another like him it would kill me."

Which left Bob Brown the youngest of six brothers.

Not bad boys, his brothers. Generally athletic, stupid, and compliant—the salt of the earth and the kind of backs society is built on. But Bob Brown was different. By the time he was eight he had maneuvered a bed of his own, by twelve a room of his own. Not bad going in a small house with a family of eight.

But perhaps it was all those shared toys that focused him on his goals so early in life. Certainly by the time he was fourteen he knew the kind of life he wanted: not a luxurious one—he was by nature satiable—but a life where he had access to and control of material comforts.

Money, it came down to really.

And by seventeen he was making lists of the ways that were open to him to get it.

Determination combined with methodicalness can make up for many deficiencies in natural endowments. Though he was smart, Bob Brown was hardly intellectual. He had no advantages of family background and no special gifts of appearance. What things can such a man do to achieve a comfortable affluence? He considered the question thoroughly. And decided his best chance was to marry money. An old answer to an old question, but tailored to Bob Brown by his place in life and his containment of his own ambitions. He was looking not for millionaire widows but for fellow high school students with "prospects."

He listed every girl in the school. He researched their parents and the number of siblings. It was a large school, with many girls in it. As often happens, fate rewards the thorough.

Constance Woodruff was not a pretty girl. Her father was not a millionaire. But Bob Brown could bear to look at Constance, and Papa Wood-

ruff was sixty-two, a widower with only the one child, and he owned the largest electronic equipment store in the area. He also had a heart condition.

Courtship began with a contrived encounter in the lobby one morning before school. It moved along to the exchange of significant presents by Christmas and was definitely serious by Valentine's Day.

Constance was only a sophomore, but she was already seventeen. In grade school she'd been held back a year with a prolonged illness, a disturbance to her social development that had never been righted. She was forever in the company of younger children and the immersion had left her stale and bored and isolated. By the time she chanced to meet the dashing senior, Bob Brown, she was ripe. By Easter, when two of the girls she had played with as a child married, she was riper still.

Bob Brown popped the question in May. Constance yessed her head off and worried only about the reaction of her father.

Bob Brown met Papa Woodruff after school one day. In the store he counted both the number of employees and the profusion of wrinkles on Papa's face. He liked the stoop with which Papa walked.

Papa Woodruff, in turn, appreciated the rapt attention Bob Brown paid to his every word and to every detail about the store and its history and development, to the prospects for its future.

The wedding took place in June, the day after Bob Brown graduated from high school.

He didn't start at the store until after the two-week honeymoon, but Bob Brown did take along some stock books to study in those spare moments when Constance, happy as a clam, dropped off to sleep.

When not on honeymoon, Constance was rarely happy as a clam. The indulgence of her parents when she was a child had brought out her natural gift for the shrewish. Bob Brown had not entirely overlooked this side of her nature—he had received some lashing from her sharp-edged tongue before he proposed—but it wasn't until the sixth month of their marriage that he saw her temper in full flower.

They were by then well ensconced in their flatlet at the top of Papa Woodruff's house. Constance had ceased to pursue her studies, with relief all around. But Bob had thrown himself into learning the business with accustomed single-mindedness.

And one night, his fourth in a row home late, Constance roasted him to a turn not unlike the meal languishing in their small electric oven. The lambasting hardly evoked a cowering reply, and although the quarrel was well made up before the nighttime lights had been turned off half an hour the incident had more effect on Constance than on her husband.

Constance Woodruff decided that if she was to have an ambitious husband, then, by God, she would move early in their conjugal bliss to have an active part in those ambitions. If Bob was going to be at Woodruff Electronics day and night, then so would she.

The following Monday she arrived at work with her husband and worked with a lack of the dilatory which amazed him no less than it amazed her father.

Before she married, her occasional labor had been a matter of marking time, getting out of the house, levering for bigger allowances and nicer dresses. Now she marked prices and sorted resistors as if her life depended on it. Which, in a sense, she had decided it did.

Though both men were amazed, Papa Woodruff was also pleased. Life was treating him well. Not only was he a success as a parent in the way such things are measured, but his little girl and her husband were always around him and working with zeal. His contemporaries had many children, and coexistent troubles, while he, a natural in the art of parenthood, was frugally but bountifully blessed.

Papa Woodruff spent a goodly number of hours in self-congratulatory reveries.

Bob Brown was not pleased with the change in Constance. Paying the price of marriage to obtain the things he wanted was fair enough. He had never loved Constance, nor thought lack of love a lack. In truth, there wasn't a great deal about her to love, though he didn't dislike her much. But to be in her company day as well as night, that was excessive.

And, more important, he watched with growing disquiet the pleasure which the daughter's presence and enthusiasm gave to her father.

Bob had worked hard since the honeymoon, but not for love of industry. He had striven to make himself essential, the irreplaceable link between the present and the future prosperity of the store. Notions of this continuity were hardly figments of his imagination. Papa Woodruff was proud of his handiwork and of his foresight in realizing that things electrical

were things of the future, and while he might not understand them he could certainly buy and sell them.

Before Constance had intruded, Papa Woodruff had indicated his pleasure with Bob Brown almost every day. It had almost reached the point where Bob thought that if he played his cards right the title to the store would come directly to him instead of to his wife. Joint ownership, at least. It was not too much to hope for, he thought. Considering. The possibility saw him through a great deal.

But as Constance learned more and more, particularly about the taking, keeping, and dispersing of monies, Bob felt her position as an obstacle to his long-term goal increasing. When a man's wife knows about his money it's an encroachment on the man's freedom. But not, in this case, a freedom the husband can easily protect.

Things continued to worsen right up to Papa Woodruff's death.

This occurred fifteen months after the happy father saw his daughter into wedlock. He went quickly through a failure of his heart.

Woodruff's death was a surprise to all, but to Bob Brown it was less a shock than the will it revealed.

By then, Bob had ceased to hope to be mentioned in the counting clauses, but surely, he reflected bitterly, the old man could have left everything clearly to his daughter, with no rigmarole.

The terms of the behest were as follows: one-third of the store and business came directly to Constance Woodruff Brown; the remaining two-thirds were to be administered by Constance on behalf of any children she might bear. On each child's twenty-first birthday he or she would receive a proportional amount of the business.

It may be assumed that the only lack the late Papa Woodruff felt at the end of his life was the lack of grandchildren.

The will made Constance want to have some kids.

The same document drove Bob Brown to reassess his life plan.

The prospect of putting in a lifetime of work for a foul-mouthed wife and her unconceived offspring was inconceivable.

Bob Brown was a consistently methodical man. When he identified a problem he mobilized all the resources at hand to solve it. He made lists, he evaluated options, and in the end he made decisions.

Clearly, there was no advantage to be had by having children. To date,

this had been a relatively easy matter. His wife's decision to join her husband and her father in the world of commerce had also been a choice to delay the pleasure of motherhood. But now community of feeling on the subject was gone. Even still, there were ways and means, and to gain time for analysis Bob Brown attended to them.

One thing he considered was making the store thrive so that even a third share would spill enough gravy his way that he could rest easy. But as time passed from the will reading the distinction between Constance and himself became increasingly sharp. Having become aware of that which can be hidden from no wife, that her husband was not fond of her, Constance's concept of what was hers strengthened like a growing weed. It became routine for little disputes concerning business procedure to be settled by the new proprietress with a declaration that it was she and she alone who was exactly that.

It was not impossible that Bob Brown could, with concerted effort, have gotten around her with an excess show of affection when she was at her least affectionable. More than one woman has yielded favors in response to what she herself can recognize as an irrational love. But such things are less easily done as time goes on. And Bob Brown was less than eager to get himself into a situation that might precipitate a pregnancy.

Relations between the couple did not improve as time drew them away from Papa Woodruff's death. Nor was there anything ahead that might sweeten things.

So Bob Brown was forced to plan a future that did not include his wife.

There were things to be said against murder. Not the least was that he couldn't practice it to make sure it could be executed well. But at least he knew that, once done, the problem would be dealt with. And, if done, it should be done sooner rather than later. There's only so much a man can do to avoid making a baby if he's unwilling to commit himself to a dramatic split with a woman who intends him to make one with her. Although babies did not apparently run in Constance's family, they certainly did in Bob's, and either way it was only a matter of time.

So Bob began to make monthly charts and also strove to make up for his inexperience at murder by frequenting the public library. He read books on poisons, weapons, and criminology—books on criminal law, true murder cases, and crime novels. He also read a little biology, wishing to use man's accumulated knowledge to prevent the worst from happening.

Only it did.

Without ever being exactly conscious that her husband was trying not to impregnate her, Constance Brown grew increasingly suspicious of his regular inquiries about the gynecological subject that was so painfully on her mind.

It must be said that few women have ever wanted to have a child more than Constance Brown did. An only child of an only parent is, perhaps, tied more to that parent's wishes than any other child. Especially when it is a last wish.

And when Bob, for whom she did feel some residual affection, seemed less than eager to do his part it made Constance all the more determined, the more eager for the connubial couch, the less prone to headache. She was not without craft on a subject that was dear to her. If she didn't realize consciously that her husband was shy to breed she realized it in her inner self. She started giving him incorrect information and leaving him deceiving clues. And sixteen months after the reading of the will Bob Brown found he was a father-to-be.

That news burned the bridge and he set himself five months to construct tragic circumstances wherein his wife would die in a robbery attempt as she worked after hours. Research had convinced him that too much machination in a killing killed the killer. The robbery attempt would be elegantly casual, and clumsy. Just one of those things.

The baby had been conceived in March and Brown planned his deed for June. So confident was he it would succeed that he relaxed and was nicer to his wife than was his custom. Whether this was a conscious resolution to ease her last months or an instinctive easing, Constance enjoyed two of the most pleasant months of their marriage.

She also put a lot of time in at the store in preparation for her lying-in. But she never did get everything really straight—nor did Bob Brown really have to create a crime to fit his needs.

In May fate took a hand.

It was one of those gorgeous days of late spring, a summer day come early, taking the world by surprise, the kind of bright, dazzling day that is not much valued in August but is a treasure in May.

Mrs. Bob Brown saw this day and insisted that her husband leave the store and come shopping with her.

Perhaps he too was vulnerable to a gift from nature, or perhaps it was just his new more relaxed self, but he agreed.

Together husband and wife drove to the center of town where, with fortune smiling like the sun, they found a parking place directly across from the store to which Constance had committed her intentions. It was a store renowned for its baby clothes and equipages. And with a degree of equanimity almost unprecedented, Brown found himself perfectly happy to have his wife place on order all the baby fineries her heart desired.

Fate did not interfere with this joyful process. And who knows but what Bob Brown was beginning to retreat from his resolve, was beginning to feel some of the joys other men might from his circumstance. Maybe he was softening to the idea of fatherhood. At any rate, he was charming and constructive and altogether nice.

Fate played its hand only after the happy shopping spree.

By the time they finished shopping the sun was setting in the west, as even the bright and gaudy May suns do. Their arms were not laden—everything they had bought was on order. They were careful to cross at the corner and on the light. If they erred, it was because they were enjoying life too much. Constance's happiness was mountainous—she revelled in finding her husband a participant and not just a chaperone.

And, with the setting sun blazing across her, Bob had perhaps never found his wife so pleasing. There was a softer edge to her voice, her tongue would not cut butter.

Whatever it was, they did not perceive the tragedy approaching from the east.

A Cadillac roared toward them as they crossed to their car. Not at eighty miles an hour, but at forty.

The problem was the setting sun, or so the driver said. He was a young man with an extremely bad driving record. His father had intervened indulgently many times before the tragic day. The father was rich and proud and took care of his own, however careless his own might be. The feckless youth would, no doubt, have stopped if he'd seen the light in time, but he didn't—and he didn't really start to slow until the sight of people crossing the path in front of him impinged itself so strongly as to overcome the near-blinding sun.

As it was, he nearly got away with it.

The boy braked and swerved, and it was only his damned bad luck, he

would tell father and friends, that there was another car in the lane beside him. His car bounced off the other and back into the line of danger.

He was going only seven or eight miles an hour when he hit them.

The Caddy knocked Bob Brown on his elbow and cracked it.

Constance landed on her head.

That was the way a large number of witnesses saw what happened and how one duly reported it to the police shortly after.

"They both got knocked down, officer. Then the man, he gets up and goes to the woman. She holds her head, but tries to get up. He helps her up and by that time there are people around them wanting to help. He asks them to get out of the way—he wants to get his car and drive her to a hospital. It's not far and he didn't want to wait for an ambulance. She seems to walk all right, but she's holding her head. But the man, officer, he didn't seem concerned about anything but getting her to the hospital. Of course I understand now, seeing as how she was pregnant and everything."

This is how it is repeatedly described in court. The boy, of course, never had a chance. But the father didn't make his million by ducking fights.

But how much fighting can you do with a woman who has lost her baby. With a woman who was healthy and active but is now confined forever to a wheelchair, unable to communicate except by blinking her eyelids, one time for "yes" and two times for "no." How can you fight a young husband's agony as he paces the hospital corridor, suffering a shattered elbow but mindless of his own pain as he waits for three days to have news of whether his wife, his love, his woman, is going to live or die?

In such a fight you are without weapons. When the woman was brought into court the boy's luck finally ran out.

Yes, she blinked, she had been shopping for baby clothes.

Yes, the light was green when they crossed.

Yes, she remembered hitting her head.

If there was one person in the courtroom who was not swept away with the tragedy of the woman's life, it was Bob Brown.

His mind was elsewhere.

Fate had been kind to him, beyond his wildest imagination. He had intended to gamble for an electronics business and had, accidentally, won far more. In cash, from the insurance settlement. In sympathy. Even in

relief from the slashing tongue. And when the last legal proceeding was complete he was satisfied yet again.

Everyone in the court listened attentively to the testimony, but none more attentively than he. But his feelings were closer to those of the boy than to the feelings of those who spoke with such emotion for the woman victim. With the boy, Bob Brown shared fear—though, unlike the boy, it wasn't the answers Constance would give that made him afraid. It was questions he feared.

He feared Constance's silent testimony about such questions as:

"Mrs. Brown, did your husband drive you directly to the hospital?"

No.

"Mrs. Brown, did your husband stop at any time along the way?"

Yes.

"Mrs. Brown, did your husband leave the car and go to the trunk?"

Yes.

"Mrs. Brown, did your husband return to the car with a tire iron?"

Yes.

"Did you see the tire iron?"

Yes:

My God, I was sure that she was unconscious!, swore Bob Brown to himself. Her eyes were closed.

"Mrs. Brown, did your husband hit you on the head with the tire iron?"

Yes.

"You saw him strike you?"

Then, Bob Brown remembered, she opened her eyes. With that thing above her head, how could I have stopped? She would have known. It would have ruined it all. Everything.

Perhaps he struck her inaccurately.

Perhaps some unkind charity stayed his hand just that fraction that meant the difference between life and death. How he had prayed for her to die—*die*—as he paced those hospital halls.

He could hardly have passed up an opportunity like that. With all his plans. There was everything ready to be finished, clean in one fell swoop. So he had swooped.

Constance was not asked the worrisome questions in court, and Bob

Brown wheeled her out a relieved man.

Relieved, but not at peace.

How could he be without knowing once and at last whether, when she had opened her eyes as he raised his good arm, she remembered what she had seen.

Or had the blow erased that last link in the chain that bound him?

Without asking, Bob Brown could never know.

But even if she did remember he could make sure she wouldn't tell. He would look after her himself, doing every little thing for her. And make sure that no one else spent enough time with her to teach her a blinking code that would enable her to communicate more fully.

Waiting on her was the price he would pay for the fulfillment of his dreams. He could see to it, he could see to it all.

Bob Brown was a methodical man. He could organize everything. And when the time came, after a comfortable lapse of sympathetic months, when the time came to evaluate his circumstances again he would be up to doing what was necessary.

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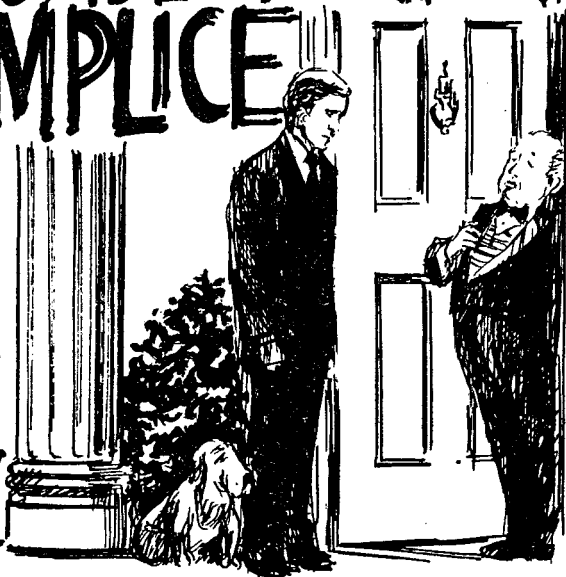
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If the butler was at the races, that only left the family. . . .

THE CASE ^{OF} THE CANINE ACCOMPLICE

by
**JOHN
LUTZ**



Sam growled beside me, as if he didn't like the looks of the rambling mansion beyond the car's windshield. The place didn't seem particularly forbidding to me, maybe because there was a fee involved in our coming here.

I pulled my Beetle into the circular drive and stopped in the shadow of one of the house's many gables. Parked on the other side of the driveway was a plain gray sedan I recognized and wasn't at all surprised to see. As

I held the door open for Sam, I glanced at the miles of wooded hills surrounding the house and wondered how much of them the Creel family owned.

I rang the bell. A butler opened the door six inches and peered down an aristocratic nose at me. "Milo Morgan to see Vincent Creel," I said.

The nose dipped a few degrees as the butler took in Sam's low, squat frame. "Come in, sir. But the, er . . ."

"Mr. Creel hired both of us," I said.

Lieutenant Jack Redaway, whose unmarked police car was parked outside, was in a large Victorian room, talking to the Creel family. Vincent Creel shook my hand and introduced me to the other family members. There was tall and elegant Robert, short and muscular James, short and almost as muscular Millicent. Like Vincent Creel, who was silver-haired, urbane, and very rich, they were all the brothers and sister of homicide victim Carl Creel.

It had been Carl Creel who had replenished the family coffers with his bestselling book on how to survive the ravages of inflation. The Creel family, struggling along on dwindling wealth from the oil dealings of their forebears, had no further financial problems after a big movie studio bought the rights to Carl Creel's book and made it into a successful comedy.

"Mr. Morgan and I have met all too often," Lieutenant Redaway said. He glanced at Sam. "I heard you had a new partner."

"This is Sam," I said. "He doesn't bite or make a mess."

"The gentleman of the firm. As a private detective, Morgan, I would think you'd have noticed that 'Sam' doesn't suit that animal's gender."

"It's short for Samantha," I explained. "Since Sam's been neutered, we use the male pronoun for the sake of convenience. But we have impressive, and accurate, business cards."

"Don't tell me. I already heard. Sam Spayed."

"Correct. And he's got a bloodhound nose." Which was true. Sam is a drab brown animal who looks like a mixture of a hundred breeds, the last generation of which might have been bulldog, but his nose is one hundred percent pedigreed bloodhound. "We'd like to examine the death scene," I said, to both Vincent Creel and Redaway, "before the scent grows any colder or is obliterated by official bungling."

Vincent led me, Sam, and Redaway to a ground floor study. "I've heard

you employ unusual methodology," he said to me. "I've also heard you get results. I want this stigma removed from our family at any cost. As we agreed at your office, I will give you carte blanche in every respect to solve my brother's murder."

I nodded. Sam shoved his pushed-in bloodhound nose against Creel's pants leg, snuffled, and gave Creel his weird kind of canine grin that might mean anything.

When Vincent had left us in the study, Redaway rolled out the hostility. "I hate to see you here," he said. "You can muddle a case more thoroughly than any shamus I know."

"If the case weren't muddled to begin with," I replied, "Sam and I wouldn't have been hired by Vincent Creel." I looked down at the large oval bloodstain that Sam already was sniffing. "That's where Carl Creel's body was discovered, I suppose."

"Your deductive powers are at full strength," Redaway said. He was as mean as his hatchet face and tiny glittering black eyes suggested.

"Fill us in," I told him, knowing he couldn't refuse. Vincent Creel had hired me, and like any smart cop, Redaway respected the Creel family's political clout.

"Carl was working here in his study the night before last," Redaway said around a smelly cigar he was lighting, "when the other family members heard a shot. They all rushed in from their various places in the house. Carl was lying on the carpet, having died from a single .22 bullet to the brain. Those french windows were wide open, and the family dog, Caster, a big Irish setter, was seen running up that hill as if chasing someone into the woods. It was obvious to all that Carl was dead, so Vincent phoned the police first, then a doctor." Redaway crossed his arms and pretended to be a smokestack.

"That's it?" I asked.

"That's a quick overview," Redaway said. He looked down and grinned as Sam coughed at the cigar smoke and glared at him.

I looked around the study. Not a large room, it was furnished expensively with a desk, small sofa, velvet chair, bookshelves, oak filing cabinets. Besides the french windows there were two other windows. The door to the hall was spring-loaded and had no latch.

"Not your locked-room type of crime," I said. "What about motive?"

"Carl had announced his intention of donating all his movie and book sale profits to the Insomniacs Society, a research group in New York.

Creel himself was a chronic insomniac. The rest of the family were losing sleep because they might lose the money."

"What you're saying is—"

"That everyone in the house at the time of Carl Creel's death had a motive. Furthermore, everyone had opportunity."

Sam sighed and stretched out where a sunbeam cast a bar of light across the floor. He gets discouraged easily. I have to do the heavy thinking.

"One of the Creels in that other room did the killing," Redaway said, "but there's no way we can get an indictment as long as they can claim it was the work of an intruder whom Carl Creel surprised."

"A jury won't buy that old intruder line," I told him.

"They will if we can't produce a weapon. And no gun was found. The Creels were all here together less than a minute after the shot was fired, so there was little or no time to hide the weapon. We've searched this house and the surrounding grounds thoroughly. No gun. The defense attorney can say, quite logically, that the intruder took it with him."

"So maybe it was an intruder after all. A burglar surprised by an unlucky Creel."

Redaway sneered around his cigar. "Maybe the butler did it?"

Sam and I exchanged glances. "What *about* the butler?"

"Bart—that's the butler—was off that night and has a concrete alibi. He was at the racetrack with Jenny, the Creels' cook. Witnesses confirm."

"What about footprints outside? And you said the dog chased someone."

"We're in the middle of a drought; the ground was too hard for footprints. And Caster wandered home after an hour or so, empty pawed."

Sam seemed to smile, baring his teeth for an instant in that quick, good-natured snarl of his.

"If there was no intruder," I asked, "what do you suppose the dog was chasing into the woods?"

Redaway shrugged. "A squirrel, a rabbit—who knows? Dogs are always running after something."

Still grinning, Sam got up and sat by the door. He had an uncanny sense of timing in a case.

"It's time for me to talk to each of the suspects," I said.

"Sure," Redaway said. "Especially the butler."

The family members told Sam and me what they'd already told the

police. Not one of them didn't complain about having to tell the story again.

Millicent Creel had been in the sewing room, talking on the phone to a friend, when she'd heard the shot. The friend had verified Millicent's story, and had even heard the shot herself over the phone. Millicent had excused herself and rushed to investigate. She'd reached Carl's study at almost the same time as her brothers. They knocked several times in quick succession, then threw open the door to find Carl dead on the floor. The french windows were standing open, and in the distance they saw Caster running into the woods as if in pursuit of something or someone.

Robert Creel had been in his upstairs bedroom taking a late afternoon nap. James, having just returned from hunting with Caster, had been showering in the bath adjoining his own bedroom. Wearing only a towel, he had rushed from his room and seen Robert already running down the stairs. They had reached the study door in time to see Vincent Creel burst onto the scene from the basement, where he had been engaged in his hobby of woodworking, and they'd seen Millicent scurrying along the hall from the direction of the sewing room.

"Calculate the distances," Redaway said when we were again alone. "Any one of them could have shot Carl Creel, then made it back to where he or she could pretend to be rushing to the study with the rest of the Creels."

"After stashing the gun," I added.

"Now if you'll just tell me where," Redaway said, "we'll simply pick up the gun, make an arrest, and wind this thing up." He was the only man I knew who could gnash his teeth and smoke a cigar simultaneously.

Sam stretched out near the sofa and made a sound somewhere between a growl and a chortle.

"Is that dog laughing at me?" Redaway demanded, seriously.

"The smoke bothers him, is all," I said. "I'd like to speak to the butler and the cook."

Redaway rolled his eyes, but he sent for Bart and Jenny.

Bart the butler told me he'd been at the racetrack at the time of the murder. At the moment the trigger was pulled, he was losing ten dollars on the daily double and he had the witnesses and worthless stubs to prove it. He said Jenny had been with him, using her complicated system of astrology in conjunction with the names of exotic spices to place her bets.

She had won twenty-seven dollars; Bart had lost fifty. They often went to the track together, usually with similar results.

Jenny was busy preparing lunch so I went to the kitchen to question her, and to see what sort of exotic spices she used. The Creel kitchen was as large and efficient looking as the kitchen of a good-sized restaurant. There were food grinders, heavy-duty processors, a commercial-size freezer, and a gas double oven that covered half of one wall. Something smelled good.

Jenny was a middle-aged, round-shouldered woman with her blonde hair pinned in a bun above a wary frown. Sam whiffed the aroma of cooking and sidled right up to her as I introduced us. Also in the kitchen was a tall, gangly Irish setter I took to be Caster. Sam and Caster ignored each other, which didn't strike me as odd. That was Sam's way, and apparently Caster's.

"I'm told you were at the track at the time Carl Creel was murdered."

Jenny nodded. She was adjusting the temperature on the eye-level oven.

"What did you think of Carl Creel?"

"Did you ask the others that?" She fixed her shrewd, gambler's eyes on me.

"No. Their alibis aren't as good as yours and Bart's. They'd be less likely to give an honest answer."

She smiled faintly. "I didn't like him," she said. "Carl Creel was a vicious and miserly man. No one liked him."

"Do you think anyone here disliked him enough—"

"I wouldn't know. I'm a cook, not a psychologist." She reached into the sink and picked up a steak bone. "You have a nice dog." She offered the bone to Sam, who turned his head away in refusal. He was poisoned on the Hatfield case and has since been leery of food from strangers.

"The hell with you," Jenny said, and gave the bone to Caster, who promptly took it out the back door.

"Sam's independent," I said.

"Bad mannered is what he is." She began chopping onions.

"Is this the daily menu?" I asked. A list was attached to the refrigerator with a magnet.

"It is."

"The same every week?"

"Every other week," Jenny said, "for variety."

"Roast beef on Mondays? Ham on Thursdays? Steak on Fridays?"

"On odd weeks," Jenny told me acidly.

"Who does the shopping?"

"Either me or Bart."

"What do you do with the garbage?"

"We put it outside in a can with a plastic liner. It's picked up once a week and taken to the dump." *Chunk!* went the knife through the onion.

Sam and I got out of there. Sam's eyes were watering.

I talked to James again, next. He told me he hadn't really been hunting on the day of his brother's death, merely walking in the woods and shooting at various objects for target practice. I went down to see Vincent, in the basement. He had his power tools out; he was making a handsome walnut plaque featuring the Creel family crest of two crossed oil derricks on a field of green. Nothing illuminating in that conversation. When I left Vincent, I hunted up Lieutenant Redaway.

"Making any progress?" he asked sarcastically.

Sam glared at him.

"I think I have this one about wrapped up," I said. "Will you arrange for everyone to meet in Carl Creel's study after lunch?"

Redaway stood staring at me with an expression of hostile incredulity. "Okay," he said, "but if you ask me, it's all a ruse so you can stay for lunch."

"Steak and salad today," I said.

"Now how would you know that?"

I smiled. "A little detective work, lieutenant." Sam gave his chortling little growl and we moved on. I had a few things to do before lunch.

After lunch, the household, including Bart and Jenny, gathered in Carl Creel's study as I'd suggested. We were joined by a tall, stoic police sergeant named Evans, sent for by Redaway at my request. Everyone stood about uneasily, trying to avoid stepping on the bloodstain. Caster sat near Robert Creel, enjoying an ear rub.

"It's time for the Milo Morgan show," Redaway said with a sneer. All eyes in the room rotated in my direction, even Sam's.

Since I already had everyone's attention, I figured I'd keep it. "I know who the killer is," I said, "and I will set about proving it."

Sam ambled over and sat by the door, wearing his stern expression.

"The key to the case is Caster," I said. "When he was seen dashing into the woods, everyone assumed he might be chasing someone. But perhaps he was running *from* someone, or, more accurately, *to* someplace. When I saw him leave the kitchen with a bone this morning, it occurred to me that many dogs have special areas where they bury their bones or go to chew on them, and usually the instant they're given a bone they dash for that place. It's an instinctive thing involving protection of food, and dogs are such slaves to instinct that their behavior seldom varies." Sam seemed to be frowning at me. "Most dogs," I added.

"Murderers are not as predictable as dogs," Redaway said. "Unless you think Caster shot Carl Creel, get to the point."

"Your story, James," I said to the youngest Creel, "is that you were out shooting the day of the murder, and that Caster was with you."

James nodded, his gray eyes cool and unblinking.

"That indicated to me that Caster, who was in the room when Carl Creel was shot, was not gunshy."

An expression of disbelief suddenly transformed Redaway's narrow face. "You're not saying that Caster was trained to get rid of the gun!"

"A dog couldn't be reliably trained to do that—not to the point where anyone would stake a murder charge on it. Not to mention that the gun still might be found."

"This seems to be leading us nowhere, then," Millicent Creel said impatiently, her pudgy features arranged in a frown. When she subsided, I turned to Vincent.

"I've been down to the basement to examine your woodworking tools," I said calmly. "I found what I was looking for."

"Which was?"

"Bone," I said. "Minute fragments of bone." Vincent's feet edged him a little towards the door. Sam growled and Redaway moved over to stand by Vincent. Redaway, though still disbelieving, was catching on.

"You used your skill with tools to fashion a simple gun out of bone," I said. "Something like the homemade zip guns street gangs carry. Only instead of using a metal barrel, you drilled a hole in the bone the exact diameter of the bore of a .22 pistol, then created a functional hammer and firing pin. Oh, the weapon was crude, and you probably had to use both hands to aim and fire it, but it only had to fire one shot, and at very close range. After you fired that shot, you handed the gun to Caster, knowing he'd run off with it, gnaw on it, and bury it. You hurried to the

basement. From there you pretended to be dashing upstairs to investigate the shot that you yourself had fired."

Vincent was obviously flustered. "Morgan, if this is some pathetic attempt of yours to . . ."

"To what, Mr. Creel?" Redaway asked, finally on top of things.

"You have no proof, Morgan!"

That's when I pulled a jar of horseradish from my pocket and rubbed some on Caster's hind paws. I put a leash on Sam and handed the end of it to Sergeant Evans. "Sam is an excellent tracker," I said, "and he loves horseradish. The scent should make it easier." From another pocket I withdrew my steak bone from lunch and handed it to Caster. The big setter clamped his jaws on it, scrambled for traction, and dashed away through the french windows I'd made sure were open.

"If you'll just follow Sam following Caster's scent," I said to Sergeant Evans, "I'm sure you'll come to the spot where a little of your own snooping around will uncover the murder weapon."

Sam had his gnarled nose to the carpet and was already snuffling and snorting like a steam engine straining uphill. Evans was stumbling, holding onto the leash, and leaning backward to keep his balance as Sam yanked him across the room and out the french windows.

"Why don't we go into the den," I suggested.

The atmosphere in that den was cool, I can tell you. Cool and tense. No one said five words until, half an hour later, Sergeant Evans and Sam walked in. I don't know which of those tenacious crimefighters was grinning the widest.

Evans showed us the bone he'd found a few inches beneath freshly turned earth. It was a neat job, all right, a big ham bone tooled into the rough shape of a handgun. A neat round hole had been drilled slightly off center, to avoid the marrow. The empty shell was still stuck inside the drilled hole, which was of larger diameter for about four inches near the butt end, to allow for a tooled cylinder of bone to be propelled, probably by a powerful rubber strap, up to the cartridge to strike with a firing pin fashioned from a filed-down pointed screw. That screw was the only metal part of the gun itself; a little more gnawing by Caster and it would have dropped off, along with the spent shell, leaving the whole apparatus to look like any dog-mistreated bone unless someone examined it and noticed the drilled hole. I figured Vincent Creel had shot his brother, slid the rubber strap up his arm out of sight beneath his sleeve,

given Caster the bone-gun, and thought he was home free. A precision-tooled perfect crime. Almost.

Vincent Creel, his face now nearly Chinese red, snarled at me and started up from his big leather armchair. But Redaway and Sam both snarled back at him, and he settled down.

Redaway got out a little card and read Creel his rights, then nodded to Evans, who put the cuffs on Creel and led him away. The rest of the family looked on in a state of shock, except for Millicent, who was dabbing at her potato nose with a handkerchief.

"What I don't get," Robert Creel said, "is why Vincent hired a private detective if he was the murderer."

"To divert suspicion," I explained. "And he thought he was safe anyway."

"He also hired the most incompetent private detective he could find." Redaway was his obnoxious self again. He knew he'd be credited with the arrest.

"He wouldn't be the first to underestimate our firm," I said pointedly.

Figuring why should we stay around to be insulted, Sam and I made for the door. Redaway was in our path. Sam walked right at him and he moved. I turned. "I'm sorry it couldn't have been an intruder," I said to the still stunned Creel family. To Redaway I said nothing, not even goodbye. Sam and I let ourselves out and didn't look back.

It wasn't until we'd got back to the office, Sam gazing out the window at the city skyline, me at my desk sorting through the mail, that it occurred to me. Since we'd hung the crime on our client, there was nobody to pay our fee. This was some business! I cursed, crumpled the half-written bill into a compact wad and hurled it into the wastebasket.

I couldn't see Sam's face, but his shoulders were shaking as though he might be laughing. It's a dog's life. It really is.

The March 31 issue of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* will be on sale March 4.

It was her first such assignment, against someone who was as dangerous as she was. . . .

THE MARTYR GAMBIT

by
JEFFRY
SCOTT



My head was still spinning when I left Freeland's office to bring the Mini round to the Horse Guards entrance, and I didn't spot Sarah until she tapped the windshield.

She looked great: the T-shirt hadn't been pristine for several days, the jeans were grubbier yet, and the sports shoes were nicely defeated, with tidemarks along the sides where somebody had been forced to hang around in them, in the rain.

Her hair had started falling into snakelike strands, as if it were greasy and hadn't been washed in a while; she was pallid, livid acne peppering one cheek. Sarah was good at making a certain impression without going over the top. Now she looked younger than her actual age, just too scruffy to be sexy. You'd let your eyes slide past her, which was the idea.

I wound the window down. "That coat going to be all right?"

She was wearing a bomber jacket, olive-drab, with matted fake fur at the collar. She eased the tag of the zip down another inch and her right hand slipped inside, as if scratching her ribs or maybe attending to her bra, except that she didn't wear one. "It's fine, Kelly. Stop fussing and let me in. I wouldn't want to be late."

Tone jaunty, eyes contradicting it. I unlocked the door and she slipped in, smelling exactly right, too—old scent, cheap stuff, and stale booze and that unmistakable, sweetish whisper of plain dirt.

We'd covered thirty miles in silence that wasn't companionable before she shrugged pettishly and said, "I hope you're not going to be silly, Tom. It had to happen, one day. I'm as good as you, remember; I've had a year as back-up while you took the sharp end. I didn't throw great big moodies over that."

"You're as good as me in theory," I said carefully. "Meaning it's all been simulation stuff, live ammo or no. You've never . . ." I shrugged.

Sarah smiled, using only a corner of her mouth. "You're a squeamish man, Thomas. For an assassin."

After a year, I knew her too well to take the bait. She wanted me to say that I was a serving army officer seconded to a British government department for the purpose of killing my country's enemies. "I'm squeamish," I agreed. "I'm also efficient enough to walk away afterwards. In your case, that remains to be proved."

Captain (Acting) Sarah Pack of the Women's Royal Army Corps shifted her chewing gum with an irritable snap and said that was nonsense. Only she used a tougher word.

"We've never quarrelled before," I observed neutrally, not begging for peace but allowing her the option.

Now the smile moved all her face. "Sorry, Tom." She sighed and fiddled with the safety belt. "We've never been ordered to kill the head of our own department before, either."

When Horace Freeland called us in and announced that Peter Dixon

was a traitor with a hero's welcome and KGB senior rank and its privileges awaiting in Moscow, I'd been shaken.

Though not surprised.

I didn't like Dixon. At my level, we had little contact, but that little had shown me a weak, arrogant, shifty, and capricious man.

Freeland had given us our orders and then sent Sarah away to draw arms and prepare herself. He told me to wait, and after some meaningless chat, told me something else. I was still trying to come to terms with it.

Freeland was a bulky chap who put me in mind of a butcher—something to do with his pink skin shiny under the tension of almost too much flesh to handle. Sausages, that was it. Sausages, and a bull's intolerant little eye, under crisp red curls. Forever looking sideways and under-browed at you, as if wanting to paw the ground and charge.

"There's a further dimension to all this, major," he grunted. Which was one way of putting it. One of the most unpleasant facets of that little heart-to-heart, though not the worst by a long chalk, was that he told me at all. It implied that in Horace Freeland's estimation (and he wasn't a fool) I'd accept the situation.

The fact that he was right, not because I'm a louse but because military people cannot pick and choose which orders they will carry out, failed to soothe me.

Did Peter Dixon deserve to be destroyed? Certainly, in my book. Had I just been given a legal order? Well, it was *an* order, right enough. In the next hour or so I had to decide what it was worth. Or what I was worth, to put it differently.

I glanced at Sarah. She'd just remarked that we'd never set out to kill one of our own, before. She had never exchanged places with me for an operation before, either. She ought to be pondering that.

"Poor bastard," she said under her breath. That hand was under her jacket again. Peter Dixon was expecting a department courier with money and the special passport with his photograph and another name, active for just one exit from the United Kingdom. Sarah would deliver it, along with something else.

"Don't think that for a moment," I said. "It's a good way to get dead. Dixon may be a drunk, but he's been in the field. Horace Freeland couldn't pull any evil stroke that Peter Dixon won't have thought of in

advance. I'm saying he'll be ready for trouble, and he can handle a pistol just as well as you."

"Point taken. But Dixon's been a boss for a long time. He won't believe that we'll set out to kill him. Arrest him, maybe. But not the other."

She might be right, but I doubted it.

According to Freeland, Peter Dixon *was* very sure of himself. He argued that agents were being swapped, openly and covertly, all the time. Now that he'd been exposed by the classic means of a Soviet defector's bartering information for safety and comfort, Dixon would go to his friends in Moscow. We wouldn't get one of our men in return, but in exchange, his disastrous activities in the department would remain secret. After Burgess, Maclean, Philby, and all that crew, it was a potent offer.

The government could put Dixon on trial; the truth was that they dreaded doing that. Even if held in camera, distorted rumours would seep out. Dixon's way, the British intelligence system would keep a few shreds of credibility, like fragile wrappings around an oft-violated, crumbling mummy. That was Horace Freeland's phrase.

Freeland had been lethally angry—at Dixon, at the people who'd fallen into the same old trap and made allowances for Dixon, and then promoted him repeatedly. He'd been especially enraged by the knowledge that once Peter Dixon was safe in Moscow, and completely debriefed, the KGB information service would go into action around the world, and the story would come out. Accepting Dixon's impudent proposal wasn't saving credibility at all, simply postponing another damaging scandal.

I could understand Horace Freeland's wanting Dixon dead. The thing was, despite Freeland's opening statements while Sarah was there, he wanted Peter Dixon alive. Somebody else had been sentenced to death.

She might be confident, but she was also worried. Otherwise she'd have noticed, long before. Dixon had a house in the country, between Bristol and the seacoast, where—officially—he was on holiday this week.

But I'd left the motorway and was on the old London to Bath coaching road before she stirred and objected. "Hey, this'll slow us down, Tom! Take the next right, get back on the motorway."

"Got a call to make." I was angling off the main road now, into what looked like a scrapyard, probably because it was. All the same, people lived here, too. "Stay in the car."

It was raining in a twilight, uncertain manner, and a dog barked. The ground was a mixture of cinders and mud.

Dodger had the trailer door open. He'd put on a lot more weight since our last meeting. His belly hid the webbing belt, and the regimental badge tattooed on his bared upper arm looked considerably wider and paler. He'd shaved sometime within living memory, but I wouldn't have wanted to bet money on naming the day. Reading my look, he chortled, "Cor, never guess I'd bin a soldier, eh?"

"Never," I agreed feelingly. He'd been a good one, in action and on the barracks square. Somehow, inside that immaculate company sergeant major, a happy slob had been whimpering to come into his own.

"Got the stuff?" I'd phoned him from a public call office, on leaving Freeland. Uncertain whether I'd change my mind, but wanting fresh cards in case I decided to throw the current ones in.

Dodger nodded, peeling a surprisingly clean and fresh-smelling blanket off the bunk. We looked at the stuff and I wrapped it in the blanket and passed him £200 in old notes.

"I'd rather have the gear back," he said, tucking the cash away.

"No, you wouldn't. Not if I use it. In fact, if you've got any sense, you'll take a long holiday, sar' major."

He shook his head, chins wobbling. "Gerroff, sir! Life's one long holiday for me. I've been in the army, and I've been in prison, see, so they can't do any more to me. If I have to do it again, I just will, and then come back here. Good luck, major."

Sarah wasn't happy. To be exact, she was bloody upset.

The way it works, we get our assignment and go and do it. The approach route may not be direct, for any number of good reasons, but you follow that route without personal diversions. For instance, if you happen to be driving past Victoria Station, with plenty of time in hand, you still don't park at a meter and dash into the shoe bar on the concourse to collect the soling and heeling job left there on the way in to the office.

"What the hell was that all about?" she demanded tautly. I gave Dodger a wave, bumped out of the yard, and switched from sidelights to full beams, before heading back towards the motorway.

"Not sure," I said truthfully. "I'm still deciding."

"I'll have to book it." She chewed her lower lip. "I will, Tom."

"You'd better, because it'll be in my report."

After that, I settled down to getting to Peter Dixon's place.

It had been a farm, but the fields were rented to a neighbor and now the low grey house sat on a rocky island in the middle of grazing land, surrounded by a low electric fence to keep sheep from wandering into its grudging margins of garden. There wasn't a drive, just two straight ruts worn by car and truck tires, bordered by diamond link wire fencing, leading from the lane up to the building.

We parked in a field gate and took turns at the night glasses.

Dixon had cut down the veteran apple trees, and the tallest foliage, out front, was in the form of shaggy wallflower plants. People who've been agents detest being surprised, and aren't at ease with themselves unless they can see newcomers from afar.

Orange squares and oblongs showed that he had lights on in there, oil lamps from the mellowness of the color. But over the front door was a big enamel-coated disc, protecting a fat electric bulb.

"I'll walk up," Sarah decided. "He's expecting a messenger, right? But I could be a lorry girl, wanting to use the phone or the toilet or whatever. If I don't roll up in a car, it'll make him just that extra bit uncertain."

She touched my arm, and her eyes weren't the least cheap and second-rate, in the setting she'd created. "Not to worry, Tom. I'll do you proud. Fastest gun in the West, me—West London, that is. All right?"

"Super," I said.

My fist didn't travel more than three inches, but I'd shifted in the driving seat and she was leaning forward, and the angle was good. Her chin bounced off my knuckles and her head thumped the side window.

I made her comfortable, as comfortable as you can be with wrists and ankles taped, and made sure she wasn't swallowing her tongue. Some people seem to shrink when unconscious or asleep. Sarah looked about twelve years old.

Peter Dixon, playing poker for his freedom, wouldn't be the least uncertain. Sarah could have pranced up there naked, or dressed as Little Red Riding Hood, and she'd still have been living dangerously.

I sat for a moment, door open, one foot on the surface of the lane. The wind sang in the phone wires, clouds raced past the moon.

Then I got the clamps and fixed the thing to the car's roof and sighted it and started the clock. Some passing driver might spot the Mini parked

in the gateway, but with a blanket tucked over the gear, he was unlikely to notice anything.

By now my eyes had adjusted to darkness. I started walking up to the house.

The alarm threads, black, would have been hard to avoid, but I made sure that I broke several in the first hundred yards.

The porch light came on, making me blink.

"Hello, Peter," I called. "It's Tommy, Tommy Kelly. They sent me down with the stuff."

And I waved, not too quickly, while my left hand was off and out to one side, fingers spread. Trying to convey somebody a bit anxious to show himself empty handed. I hoped. The pistol was in my right, waving hand all the while—a little Czech Kvb. 18 painted sort of hand color. (Airfix plastic model paints, if you want to try it, Dark Earth and Flesh hues, mixed.)

The revolver was tiny and not much use to people who didn't make a habit of hitting what they pointed at.

Dixon was standing well back in the doorway and the door itself was only a little open. I made half a dozen more steps, wondering what had happened to the rifle I'd fixed up on the car. Dodger had always been very clever at clockwork firing devices but we all have our off days.

Peter Dixon moved, he shouted something scared and angry and triumphant, and then the rifle fired.

Either my sighting was out or the rifle hadn't been zeroed in as Dodger swore to me it had been. Then again, maybe I'd walked farther than I'd intended when setting it all up.

There was a sob of displaced air right beside my cheek.

Peter Dixon had been under fire before, and he could tell that I hadn't fired the shot because the report was fairly distant and in any case I wasn't holding a long gun. He could also tell that the shot wasn't meant for him, but me. Apparently, that is; far too apparently for my cardiac welfare. It scared seven kinds of daylights out of me, and Dixon could see that, too.

As planned, his mind insisted on grappling with all that data, giving me long enough to see that he had a shotgun. *Just* long enough to bring my little Christmas-cracker toy into the aim and fire twice, *rap-rap*, who's there?

Dixon went over backwards and lay still. The shotgun hitting the door-step made far more noise than my shots. The gun lay there, twin muzzles

towards me, as if the Invisible Man were crouching down behind the doormat somehow, peering through his dark glasses.

I started laughing shakily and had a hard time stopping. I went back down the lane. There was no point in checking Dixon. Either I'd killed him or I'd missed, and if I'd missed, he would have killed me by now. Thank goodness something was simple.

Sarah was very quiet, after I'd released her. Not only because of the bruise staining the side of her jaw, though she kept gritting her teeth gingerly and cursing under her breath.

A few miles out of Swindon, she used some of those airline sponge pads and cleaned her face and got her hair into better shape. "I suppose you know you're finished," she said at last. Not as a question.

"I shouldn't wonder. Look, d'you mind driving, now? I'm not feeling all that clever."

"You aren't," she commented bleakly. We changed places; she hissed as my hand dived, fingertips grazing her breast, and then I'd got the 9mm. self-loading pistol out of her shoulder rig.

I released the safety catch and pointed it down between our feet and squeezed the trigger, kept squeezing. Nothing happened; it was the safest deadly weapon in the world—unless you happened to be holding it on a target likely to shoot back.

"That's why you couldn't have taken Dixon, my love. I doubt whether you could have anyway, on a good day. That's not male chauvinism, Dixon was good and he was rock-bottom desperate to stay alive. You just wanted to kill him. There's a difference, I promise."

My voice sounded tinny, I wasn't even very interested any more, as I passed her the pistol and slid down in the seat. "But with that, you couldn't win. You weren't meant to. Horace Freeland set you up, he wanted you dead and Peter Dixon provably the man who murdered you."

Sarah started the engine and put the Mini in gear. Her voice was well controlled. "Why would he do that, Thomas?"

I yawned until my jaw cracked. "Because he's incredibly devious and probably the tiniest touch off his rocker.

"He wanted Dixon discredited, but alive. Freeland thinks—thought—Peter Dixon would crack after a few years in prison, not as a blown double agent, but an ordinary criminal.

"Like me, officially you're not in the army any more. You resigned

your commission eighteen months ago. Your cover story is that you're a middle-class dropout, you drift around, no visible means of support. Not quite a whore; it's a useful identity, nobody's surprised wherever they find you.

"Dixon liked women, correction, he'd make a pass at anything female that moved and wasn't a direct relative." I watched the dotted white line in the middle of the highway flicking past us like tracer bullets, wondering if I'd fallen asleep. "Where was I?"

"Me and Peter Dixon."

"Okay, he shoots you, I jump in and collar him, spirit your useless pistol away, call the police. My version: I had an appointment with Dixon, rolled up to find him killing you.

"That way, Horace Freeland gets his trial, but not the one they all dreaded. The police would get a lovely package from a picked set of random witnesses, Dixon's 'friends,' your 'friends.' You'd been having an affair, he tried to give you the elbow, you'd got nasty and were making scenes.

"As far as the public knows, Peter Dixon's a fairly minor official in a very undramatic arm of government. He could yell his head about it all being a frame, and who'd believe him? Same goes for the KGB; they leak the news that Dixon's a mole, and any reporter following it up would find an obscure civil servant who'd murdered a scrubber in pretty squalid circumstances, and was trying to make a big political deal out of it."

I wanted a drink, *at once*, with no chance of getting it. "That's how Horace Freeland saw it, anyway. An acceptable sacrifice, one junior officer paid in return for undiminished morale and checkmate to Peter Dixon and his masters."

The car swerved, Sarah was staring at me.

"He *told* you?"

"Oh yes, otherwise I couldn't put stage two of the operation into effect, citizen's arrest of Dixon, losing your gun, calling the police."

It took her all of a quarter-minute to see the rest of it.

"But he'd only do that if he didn't know . . ." She cleared her throat and her chin went up a trifle. She's a smashing person, but unexpectedly prim at times. ". . . know about us." She was frowning, hands tight on the wheel.

Sarah had her Earls Court studio apartment and I kept rooms in Notting Hill but in practice, we lived together and certainly slept together when-

ever possible, at one or the other home. Peter Dixon would have known about that, he was slapdash or liked to register as being so, but he was on top of the department. If Dixon knew, and he'd had to, then Horace Freeland also knew.

Because Freeland loathed and detested Dixon as only a Whitehall second-in-command avid for promotion can hate a boss who constantly patronizes and humiliates him. It was an article of faith for Freeland to become aware of everything Peter Dixon discovered—and preferably, more.

I said drearily, "I can't work that out, either. Don't bother, Sarah. We'll know, soon enough. They've been following us ever since we left Dixon's place."

There was a service area a few miles on—cafe each side of the motorway, connected by a bridge, filling station, truck park, car park.

We took a slot way off by itself and very soon a black Daimler slid in beside the Mini and Horace Freeland got out. The three of us stood around the Mini's hood, like very large infants pretending to have a picnic.

"I left a team arranging matters," Freeland said, though I hadn't asked. "It was thoughtful of you to use such a small-calibre revolver, Major Kelly. The doctor said the grouping was admirably tight, he'll have little trouble, um, adjusting the wound after removing the bullets. Fortunately, the wretched Dixon cooked by gas, the sort you store in those cylinders. There'll be . . ." He shot his cuff and nodded at his watch. ". . . there is a terrible fire which will gut the house and be the death of Peter Lascelles Dixon."

"Three cheers for our side." I felt giddy. "What happens to us?" I put my arm round Sarah's waist, she stiffened for an instant and then relaxed and leaned in against me.

"Touching," Freeland murmured. A distant car lit his beefy face, highlighting sweat along the tight-curved hairline. "At the very least, major, you've been insubordinate. Not to mention grossly irresponsible.

"What will happen to you? Your name will be erased from the Army List all over again, and in earnest this time. I'll do my utmost, in whatever spare time I have for trivial pleasures, to see that you never get a worthwhile job again."

Sarah smoothed my jacket. "And me?"

Freeland's aftershave became perceptible as he leaned forward. "I see

that Kelly hit you. Chivalrous but ungallant. . . . You would have attempted to carry out your orders, no doubt. But as Kelly's mistress, you were off guard in his company. Your career, such as it was, is over, Miss Pack."

Sensing her relaxing a notch as the thunder and lightning seemed ready to roll past, I shook my head. As much to clear it as to signal disagreement.

"Come on, Freeland, why did you go out of your way to explain that Sarah was to be sacrificed for your plan to work? You're an utter failure at being human, but a chump you're not. You had to be fifty percent sure I'd intervene. . . ."

He sneered up at me. "Wrong question, major. Why did I send either of you, eh? The marginal bonus of sending people whom Dixon knew was cancelled by the pair of you having worked for and occasionally with Peter Dixon. In your case, Kelly, for years.

"What's that famous lecture of yours, to our apprentice . . . um . . . people-removers? *The slightest emotional involvement can be a handicap*. Knowing that, I still sent Major Kelly and Captain Pack, breaching every sane law of this type of work by letting you see the skeleton of the whole operation." Freeland paused. "Or pretending to let you see."

Yawning again, I tried to nudge him along. "Open another Chinese box, Freeland. With your sort, there's always some more inside."

His manner, schoolmaster and bully and 18th century hunting squire, faltered by a hair. Possibly I wasn't all blind reaction. . . .

"That defector who exposed Dixon," Freeland said, "alerted us to Dixon's associate, too. Somebody in the department, under him, who would do anything for the man."

Sarah sobbed and wrenched away from me, mouth pulling out of shape. "Tom!"

Freeland ignored her, concentrating on me. "I couldn't resist, major. How amusing and potentially instructive, to send Peter Dixon's creature to liquidate him!

"The order might well be carried out, since the associate would be desperate to stay in place in the department. But there was also a chance that they would crack, attempting to warn Dixon and thus confirming their divided loyalty."

"Not divided," I corrected. "Not given to the department, that's all. Devoted to Dixon, and another set of bureaucrat-psychopaths."

Freeland's mouth twisted as he gestured dismissively. "As you will. The attempt was made. A telephone call to Dixon, within minutes of my briefing you. Assuming, rightly, that his line wasn't secured, the caller pretended to have dialled a wrong number. One of those trivial incidents calculated to make a worried man even more wary."

Suddenly I was wide awake and ready for anything. A minor adrenalin high, it wouldn't last. "You really are a bastard, Freeland." To my disgust, I felt a shade of admiration.

"Stop it," Sarah wailed, "stop playing games, it's obscene. Finish it."

Freeland's shoulders squared. He sounded bored. "So be it. The caller's voice was disguised but we have the audio-print for confirmation if needed. The voice was female, Captain Pack."

She moved very fast, but I wanted to tell Sarah it wasn't her night for firearms. I'd felt her sneak the revolver out of my pocket when I hugged her, a few minutes earlier. I had lied to her in the car. I'd thought it all through, about Freeland telling me. The likeliest answer to the riddle was that Peter Dixon wasn't working alone. Since there were only two of us, and it wasn't me, no great feats of deduction were called for.

That's why I'd emptied the revolver before returning to Sarah.

Freeland was a desk man, but to his credit, he didn't panic and he didn't freeze when she pulled the thing. Stiff-arming me out of the line of fire, he tried to grab her. She swayed out of reach and slammed the muzzle against her temple and pulled the trigger and fainted before understanding the meaning of that futile, answering click.

Freeland wiped his face and grimaced, brooding down at her. "I misjudged you, major. I may allow you to stay on strength."

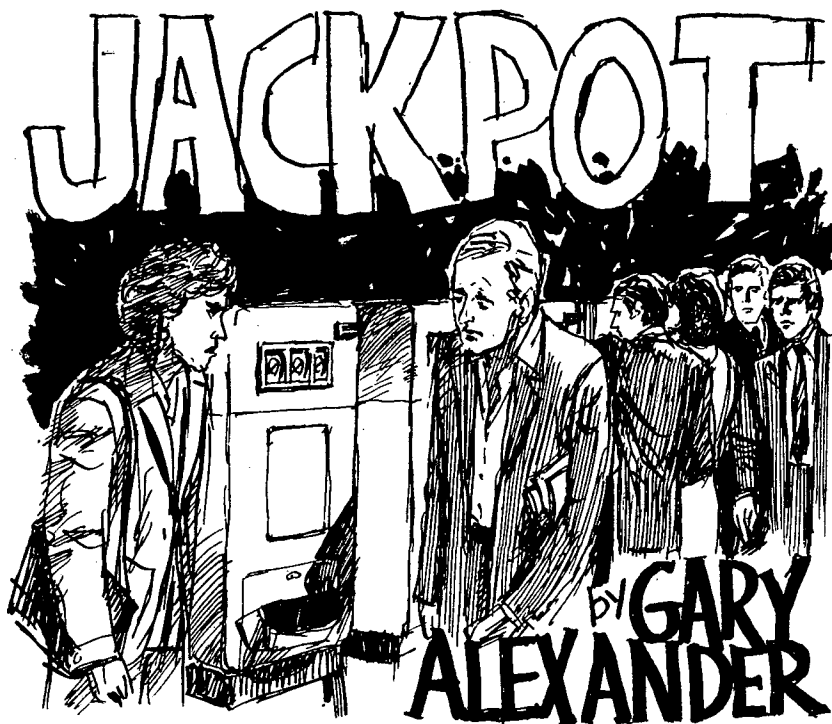
His minders were getting out of the big car, to pick her up. She lay like a corpse, she'd tried to become one, and the rest of her life wouldn't be much improvement on that note.

I came to attention, raggedly. "Don't spoil things, Horace old sport. You promised my career was over for ever and ever, amen. I'm holding you to it."

He didn't argue. Eyes shut, I heard doors slam and the car pull away. It was cold in the Mini, and cramped, but the need for rest and better yet, oblivion, was overriding.

Life goes on, was my last conscious thought before sliding down the road to nightmares. But not just yet, thanks all the same.

Earl just wanted to go fishing. Instead, his wife had dragged him off to Las Vegas. . . .



“We’re in one of the glamor capitals of the world,” Lois said. “Is that all you’re going to do? You can watch TV at home.” Lois Balon was a large woman whose voice had a chalkboard quality.

Five days and four nights in Reno could be considered either a short vacation or a long weekend; in any event, an unforgettable experience. Earl Balon took an entirely different view. The trip was a concession to Lois, who’d vociferously stated that she’d had it up to *here* with Deep

Lake. Not this year, she said. No mosquitoes, no fish to clean, no outdoor privy next to the cabin. No no no!

Earl, of course, yielded. He could not remember when he'd last won an argument with her, knew he wouldn't start a winning streak with this matter. He even feigned interest in the flashy brochures and discount coupon books Lois had brought home from the travel agent, all the while worrying about whether they could get the Deep Lake cabin back next year.

"We just got in last night. I'm tired," Earl said, gazing at *Flying Leathernecks*. John Wayne had just delivered an enemy fighter pilot to his ancestors.

"Anyway, it's almost over," he added.

"Our vacation will be too by the time you get moving."

Earl sighed, lifted his lean frame from the edge of the hotel room bed, and shut off the set. Another advantage of Deep Lake, he thought, was the ease of avoiding arguments. He'd be up at dawn and out on the lake with his spinning gear and a thermos of coffee, then back at mid-morning with fish to clean. He'd spend the day relaxing while Lois was absorbed in her movie magazines. After dinner—back out on the water with a six-pack. Sheer joy.

"All right," he said. "Let's go break the bank."

Downstairs in the casino, Earl cashed fifty dollars into chips and tokens, and gave Lois half.

"Is that all?" she asked. "It won't last."

"Be conservative."

"I'm here to have fun, not count pennies," Lois snapped.

"Me too," Earl said. "I'm having a ball."

After Lois stomped off to devastate a roulette croupier, Earl headed for the keno area, stopping first at the lobby for a gardening magazine and the latest *Field and Stream*. Good game, keno; I can bet a dollar or two, he thought, and read between drawings. Or doze off, daydreaming about Deep Lake and its luscious rainbow trout. Or fret about leaving the house and garden in the charge of Steve, their only child. Steve, a twenty-three-year-old adolescent, had promised to water every morning. Earl hoped this would be one promise he'd keep.

It seemed like only a moment before Lois returned.

"Did you win?"

"Hmmpf. I hit black three spins in a row and I swear the dealer pushed a button under the table. They're all rigged, you know. I need more money for the slot machines."

Earl reached for his wallet and, suddenly inspired, handed Lois three fifties, over half their remaining gambling money. If she blew it fast, he knew, they'd have to go home early. Earl wasn't due back to work until Monday; he'd still have time to tie the rowboat to the top of the station wagon and get up to Deep Lake for a couple of days, even if it meant sleeping in the car. Maybe he'd invite Beanie along. Beanie, from the plant, was his best friend. Beanie's passion was playing the ponies, but he also liked to toss a line into the water.

Earl's largesse temporarily silenced Lois. She recovered and asked, "How are you doing?"

"Oh, well, I'm down three dollars."

She stared at the magazine on his lap, opened to an article on the methods of staking tomato plants.

"You're really an exciting person, Earl."

Earl Balon nodded his head, only half-hearing, engrossed in the pros and cons of wire and cedar poles.

Earl was bored. He'd finished both magazines and the keno operation now owned nine of his hard-earned dollars. He got up and began browsing. He was more interested in the people than the gaming. He'd never been to a place like this before, but had heard stories of how stable, ordinary folks went a little crazy in such an environment. Like Lois.

The slot machine section was especially fascinating. They were lined up, row after row, like shelves in a supermarket. He watched a woman draw coins from her purse, plug them into the one-armed bandit, and pull the lever. She was mechanical, zombie-like. Kerchunk, kerchunk, kerchunk. It reminded Earl of the stamping presses at work.

Lois came up to him.

"How'd you do?" he asked.

"They let you win just enough to tease you," she said sourly. "How about you?"

Earl told her.

Lois rolled her eyes. "I don't know how your heart can stand it. Try one of these."

"They're all dollar machines here," Earl said. "There're some quarter machines over behind us."

"Lord God Almighty, Earl!"

Okay, he decided, if it'll keep peace. He put a dollar token into the nearest machine and jerked the handle. The cylinders spun and clicked to a stop. Three identical pictures lined up, but something was wrong. No coins gushed from the slot. Instead, a siren went off and a light over the machine began blinking.

People gathered around, as if a grisly accident had just happened. Two beefy men pushed through the crowd to Earl.

"Sir, would you come up to the office with us?"

Earl signed some papers he didn't fully understand. The Internal Revenue Service agent thanked him and tucked them inside his briefcase.

"How would you like it, sir?" asked the casino manager. "Cash, chips, check, or any combination thereof?"

Earl was out of shock by now. "Can a check be sent directly to our bank?"

"For the full amount?" asked the manager. "Most big winners prefer to retain some of their winnings to, shall we say, further enhance their visit."

"All of it to the bank," Earl said.

"Earl!" Lois said.

"As you wish," the manager said icily. "It has been three years since we've had a Grand Jackpot winner. You have over a hundred thousand dollars after taxes. You are a very lucky man."

Earl glanced at Lois, whose face was a clenched fist.

"I know," he said. "I know."

An expensive sports car was parked in the driveway when the Balons got home. The house was a mess, the living room an obstacle course of TV dinner trays and beer cans. Steve had been asleep on the couch, but awakened when they entered.

"Congratulations," he said. "And how do you like it?"

Earl hadn't been able to dissuade Lois from calling Steve the night of the windfall. He knew it would be a mistake.

"How do I like what?" Earl asked.

"You know, the car. The salesman let me keep it overnight, so you could see it when you got home."

"This mess," Lois muttered, shaking her head, her temper well under control. She was much more tolerant of Steve's shortcomings than Earl's.

"I was going to clean it up," Steve said sincerely. "I just didn't expect you guys back so early. I had some friends over last night to celebrate you guys scoring down there. What about the car, Dad?"

"What about it?"

"It's not just a car, Dad. It's an investment. It'll go up in value, according to the salesman, because they don't make cars with that much horsepower any more."

Steve had flunked out of college after two quarters, had lived at home ever since. He'd majored in economics and the reasons for his chronic unemployment were interesting and complex. Something to do with stagnation in the private sector, combined with restrictive growth policies of the Fed. Lois felt that it was only a matter of time before the lad found his niche.

"We'll talk about it later," Earl said. "Much later."

"Dad!"

"Your father doesn't believe in snap decisions," Lois said sourly, scooping debris into a garbage bag. "Likely, the money will rot in our mattress."

"C'mon, Dad."

"Did you take care of the garden?"

Steve closed his eyes and slapped himself on the forehead. "Oh wow!"

Earl went out back into the garden and scuffed soil with his shoe. A small cloud of dust fluffed up. His corn was a sickly yellow. The leaves on his tomato and pepper plants drooped, resembling crumpled crepe paper.

Earl squatted, lit a cigarette, and studied his mini-Dust Bowl. Television and the movies, he mused, there was always some film or another about hit men and what they did. Sure, the cops got them in the end, but that was just make-believe. All it took was money.

The guys at the plant welcomed him with everything but a brass band. A reporter and photographer from the local paper had been over and the story made the front page.

Earl Balon worked in a factory that manufactured automotive accessories—mud flaps, bug shields, and various types of brightwork. He'd

been there twenty-two years, would have his rocking chair money in eight more. Deep Lake and its battling trout would have Earl Balon to deal with *all* summer.

"Hi, moneybags," Wilson said with a grin.

"The Man from Fort Knox," Ollie chimed in.

"When you buy this place," Smithson joked, "lay down some carpeting. Concrete is murder on the feet."

Beanie was over by the five-ton brake, leaning on his broom. Beanie just winked. Beanie was just the same as always; Earl wished he could say the same about the others.

The guys gathered Earl up even before the noon whistle blew and took him out to a restaurant to celebrate his return, which nobody had ever done for anybody before. The Hefty Bull was a far cry from the lunch wagon that pulled in by the loading dock and beeped its horn. It was all dark wood and fake leather and waitresses in tutus and mesh stockings. The prime rib was so tender you could cut it with a glance. No one seemed concerned about all those drinks and their effect on the afternoon's production, not even Weems, the plant superintendent, who didn't say more than five words a month to Earl.

Today, though, he sat beside the honored guest, grinning, winking, nudging, telling his latest jokes and describing his present gadget. Weems was a frustrated inventor whose past genius had been suppressed by the big corporations. His latest breakthrough was a hundred-mile-per-gallon carburetor which would, according to Weems, put the goddamn A-rabs back in the date and fig business where they belonged. If you had the capital to promote and develop it yourself, Weems explained, the large companies couldn't do a damn thing about it.

Earl Balon, seeing double now from the drinks, wished Weems the best of luck.

"It's a great opportunity for someone with the guts to take a chance on the future," Weems said, reddening.

"I'm pulling for you all the way, Mr. Weems," Earl said, just sober enough to know what would happen if he showed interest, just drunk enough not to care if Weems was disappointed.

The flow of dirty jokes and technical information stopped. After a couple of toasts to Good Guy Earl Balon, the check was presented. To Earl. It was more than his monthly house payment.

"I'd like to," Earl said, flushed. "I mean, I thought I was being— If I'd known, I'd— I didn't, uh, bring any cash."

No problem, his buddies said. No sweat, no big deal. We understand.

But Earl rode back alone with Beanie and his beat-up truck. Beanie swept the floor at the plant when he wasn't oiling the machines. Beanie was scrawny, forty years of age, and everything he wore looked two sizes too large. He had no more ambition than Earl, except for the wish to hit the Exakta out at the track.

"Vampires," Beanie said. "Pure and simple."

"Only natural," Earl said. "But tell me something, your bookie, they have connections, you know, all of them, with the underworld and that kind of thing?"

"All I know," Beanie said, "is that if a horse I like goes lame, like a lot of them seem to do, he wants me to come on by and settle up."

"But he must know a guy who, maybe, knows a guy who knows a guy. You know, if you want something done that's not in the Yellow Pages."

Beanie looked over at Earl and smiled. "You thinking about getting your old lady whacked out?"

"I don't know what I want. Okay? I'm just checking things out."

"When you had me over for dinner," Beanie said, "I got the idea that Lois didn't like me."

"She doesn't like me either," Earl said.

"I'll see what I can do," Beanie said.

Earl stayed calm when Lois explained the six thousand dollar expenditure. He'd just sorted the mail, the junk from realtors, insurance companies, and investment brokers. It was a good half-inch thick. Not to mention Ma Bell's charge for changing the unlisted number *again*. And the bill from the burglar alarm outfit, who assured them that they'd never have to worry: if those animals who ransacked your house see our hardware, they'll move on to greener pastures.

"It's nice that Steve is finally on his own," Earl said, "but why does it cost so much?"

Lois looked different, but Earl couldn't quite pin it down. Could be the hair. It was curly like Little Orphan Annie's and not as gray as it used to be. The clothes looked new too, bright-colored and tight.

"You wouldn't care if he lived in a garret," Lois accused him. "Just so

you could be rid of him. A good address is not cheap, and they all require the first and last month's rent, plus a damage deposit."

"They'll need that damage deposit," Earl said.

"And he can hardly go on job interviews without a wardrobe," Lois said. "Steve is very very enthusiastic. He wants to become a responsible citizen, despite your stinginess."

"My stinginess?"

"You haven't touched that money and you haven't even offered an idea what we'll do with it. If I don't step in, you'll let it rot in the savings account, as sure as God makes little green apples."

"I don't want to be hasty," Earl said. "I don't want to make a mistake."

"Hmmp, you'd probably like to spend it to buy that filthy little cabin at Deep Lake."

"I thought about it. What's this?" Earl said, looking at the papers Lois handed him. The print was so small he needed his glasses.

"The top piece is Steve's lease. Since he hasn't got a job yet, they require you to sign. You *are* his father."

Earl signed. "And this other one?"

"My attorney drew it up."

"What attorney? We never had to hire a lawyer for anything."

"It was Steve's idea. You know how sharp he is about economics. Steve said that with inflation and all, your silly idea of leaving it in the savings account until you make up your mind—Lord knows that could take years—will cause it to shrink down to nothing."

"So what's your point? What's this paper here you want me to sign?" The print was even finer than that of the lease. And Earl was dead-tired too; Weems had transferred him to the loading dock.

"Half for you, half for me. I'm your legal wife, after all. You spend yours the way you want, I spend mine."

"Just a minute," Earl said, getting up.

"Where do you think you're going?"

"To the bedroom to change clothes and shoes."

In the bedroom, Earl called Beanie.

"Remember that favor I asked?"

"Sure. You want to be connected with a guy."

"Can you do it?"

"I talked to my bookie. Any time."

"Tonight?"

"I guess."

"Good, and what are you doing this weekend?"

Earl returned to the living room and signed the paper. Every muscle in his body ached. He must've lifted ten tons of sheet metal and bar stock today.

"I'm going out for a while," he said as Lois snatched the paper out of his hands. "And I'm also going up to the lake this weekend."

"Suit yourself," Lois said without interest.

"Say, what about that money for Steve?"

"What about it? It came out of your half. Read what you signed. Paragraph thirty-eight."

Earl and Beanie's bookie's associate did not exchange names the first time they met, nor did they now. The man's office, so it seemed, was a rear-corner table in a downtown dive called The Railbird, beneath a fly-specked photo of Citation.

"Do you have it?"

"You got the money?" The man was skinny, wore sunglasses and an expensive suit.

Earl and the man traded envelopes. The man held Earl's in his lap and counted, moving his lips.

Earl looked out the window and saw Beanie parked across the street, ready to drive him to the next town and its airport.

Beanie had followed Earl to Deep Lake the night before. At midnight they poked a small hole in Earl's rowboat and set it adrift. A hundred feet from shore it sank in the aptly-named lake.

Deep Lake claimed its share of drowning victims; rarely were the bodies recovered. Soon, Earl knew, other anglers would become curious and concerned about Earl's car, his sleeping bag and belongings inside it.

While the man counted, Earl examined what he had purchased: a new identity with supporting documents, including a passport.

"It's all there," the man said.

"You did a good job," Earl said.

The man shrugged. "That's what you paid me for. Kind of out of my line, though. Had to make a bunch of calls. When I eliminate somebody, I usually take what you'd call a more direct approach."

"You did just fine," Earl said, getting up.

"How come New Zealand?" the man asked.
 "Do you fish?"
 "Nah. That's what they got fish markets for."
 "Have you a vegetable garden?"
 The man smirked. "You kidding?"
 "Fishing in New Zealand is superb," Earl explained. "And the climate is mild, the soil rich."
 "I don't get it."
 "I know somebody else who wouldn't either," Earl said.



STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION (Required by 39 U.S.C. 36.85)

1. Title of Publication: Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, Publication No. 00025224. 2. Date of Filing: October 1, 1981. 3. Frequency of Issue: Every 28 days; (A) No. of Issues Published Annually: 13; (B) Annual Subscription Price: \$16.25.

4. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication; 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.

5. Complete Mailing Address of the Headquarters or General Business Offices of the Publishers (not printers): 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.

6. Names and Addresses of Publisher, Editor and Managing Editor: Publisher: Joel Davis, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017; Editor: Cathleen Jordan, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017; Managing Editor: Same, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.

7. Owner: Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017; Davis Communications, Inc., 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017; Joel Davis, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017; B. G. Davis Trust, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017; Carol Davis Teten, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.

8. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages or Other Securities: None.

10. Extent and Nature of Circulation: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months. (A) Total No. Copies Printed (Net Press Run): 292,548; (B) Paid Circulation: (1) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors and Counter Sales: 59,008; (2) Mail Subscription: 118,430; (C) Total Paid Circulation: 177,438; (D) Free Distribution by Mail, Carrier or Other Means Samples, Complimentary, and Other Free Copies: 168; (E) Total Distribution (Sum of C and D): 177,606; (F) Copies Not Distributed: (1) Office Use, Left Over, Unaccounted, Spoiled After Printing: 2,105; (2) Return From News Agents: 112,837; (G) Total (Sum of E and F—should equal net press run shown in A): 292,548.

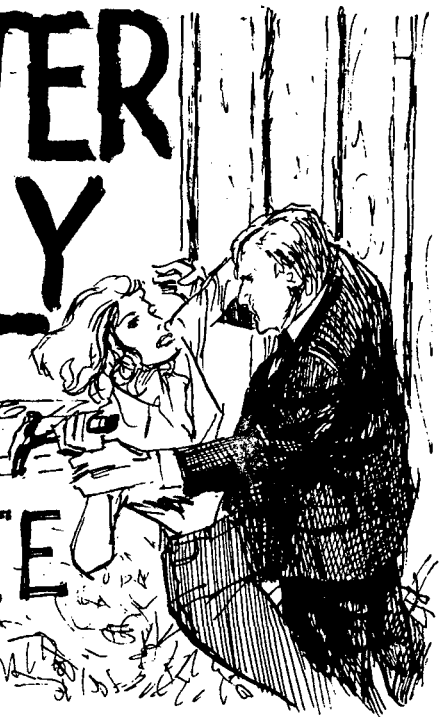
Actual Number Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date. (A) Total No. Copies Printed (Net Press Run): 267,767; (B) Paid Circulation: (1) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors and Counter Sales: 50,100; (2) Mail Subscriptions: 136,500; (C) Total Paid Circulation: 186,600; (D) Free Distribution by Mail, Carrier or Other Means Samples, Complimentary, and Other Free Copies: 417; (E) Total Distribution (Sum of C and D): 187,017; (F) Copies Not Distributed: (1) Office Use, Left Over, Unaccounted, Spoiled After Printing: 750; (2) Returns from News Agents: 80,000; (G) Total (Sum of E and F—should equal net press run shown in A): 267,767. I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.

Leonard Habas
 Vice President of Circulation

Fantanni was called the Corkscrew because he never did anything straight. . . .

A MATTER OF FAMILY

—by—
**LAWRENCE
TREAT**



When the phone buzzed, Chief Willy Wharton sat up straight like he'd been taught in school. Somehow it didn't seem right to lean back and keep his feet up on the desk when the other end of the line had a guy in trouble.

Or a dame.

It was a man's voice, though, and it was slow and flat and sure of itself,

and it had an accent that was a mixture of whatever you thought it was along with whatever you'd never heard before.

"My name's Richard J. Fantanni," the guy said, and that explained a lot. Riccardo Fantanni was known as the Corkscrew because he never did anything straight. He'd run a few rackets but he'd unloaded while he was still ahead, and here he was living a brand new life in LePage County, which was Willy's bailiwick.

"Ottoville," Willy said. "The house out on Boxwood Lane. You got a private lake and when people fish in it you get them arrested."

"They're my fish," Fantanni said. "I eat them."

"Granted," Willy said. "So?"

"So somebody's stealing my netsukes," Fantanni said. He pronounced it *netsky*. "They're doing it systematically, one a week."

"Netsky?" Willy said. "What's that?"

Fantanni spelled it out and then pronounced it again. "Most people elide the 'u'. I've even seen it spelled that way."

"Aside from the spelling," Willy said, "what's a netsuke?"

"Ah, of course. I suppose not many people are familiar with these carved masterpieces from Japan. Without trying to expatiate on their history, let me say that the Japanese kimono has its merits, but it lacks pockets. As a result, the Japanese often carried a purse or a box on a string attached to the obi. The sash, that is. The netsuke acted as a toggle for the string, or as a counterweight to the *inro* or—" Fantanni broke off. "Am I clear?"

"No," Willy said.

"No matter. They're exceedingly beautiful and I collect them, and someone's been stealing them from me at the rate of one a week."

"Where do you keep them?"

"In a locked cabinet."

"Any idea who's taking them?"

"Idea, yes. Suspicion, no. You appreciate the distinction?"

Willy said "No," again, and Fantanni said, "Ah."

The rest of the conversation never took place. All Willy heard was a groan and a gasp, followed by a sound that could have been a hand dropped on a book, a body falling, or a blunt instrument landing on a skull. After that the phone was replaced and Willy got going.

That evening he told Dan Moorhead, his counterpart in Morgan County

across the state line, all about it. As usual, the two chiefs met over an after-dinner beer at the Right Side Bar & Grill in the booth reserved for them, which was the first on the right as you came in. They filled it nicely, about four hundred and thirty pounds gross, with Dan well ahead.

In appearance, they presented quite a contrast. Willy looked as if he'd been hacked out with an axe whereas Dan had the outward sheen of polished alabaster. If Willy resembled a demon war-god, Dan could have passed for a Buddha.

There were other differences too. Willy was married to Kate, and liked it, whereas Dan's great love was the encyclopaedia.

"I kept the news off the radio," Willy remarked. "Don't know exactly why, but it seemed like a good idea. And as it turns out, all Fantanni had was a flesh wound, because when you're as fat as him it takes a two-foot knife to slice through and get to where it hurts, and the knife was short. So it's no cigar."

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes. He's at the Danforth Hospital. Danforth's a friend of his."

"Did you speak to him?"

"To Danforth? Sure. He says Fantanni was lucky, nothing vital was struck."

"What about Fantanni? Who knifed him?"

"He says he cut himself shaving. He implies it's a private matter, by which he means a family affair, and the only family he's got is that son of his. So when Fantanni says it was an accident, I put it down just like that. An accident."

"Just because he asked you to?"

"It's a little game we're playing, him and me, and it's his turn to go first. Dan, when stuff gets stolen on a regular schedule like that, it's either conspiracy or extortion, but it ain't no honest-to-God larceny. Or at least larceny's only part of it."

"Is that all you got out of him?"

"Well, he's all bandaged up and says he's a dying man and in no condition to talk, so I figure I'll wait a day or two until he has time to build up a pretty good story and thinks he can get away with it, then I can take it apart. Dan, what in hell is a netsuke? Who collects them?"

"People. Museums. They date back to the 14th century, and the early ones were pieces of wood or bone, which acted as ready-made toggles. Wisteria roots, for instance, tend to be twisted into funny shapes, which

can suggest things like dragons and mermaids. Hence the art of the netsuke, which flourished over the next few centuries. Some of them were carved in ivory and lacquered or dusted with powdered gold."

"Are they worth much?"

"It depends. A few hundred, a few thousand? Given a certain status, *objets d'art* depend largely on their rarity value. Some of them were fashioned by known artists and are signed—those are expensive as all hell. Fantanni is an intelligent guy and probably has the best. Do you know his background?"

"Everybody knows he has dough and how he got it. I'm told he lives alone, with a butler and a cook."

"A retired sybarite," Dan said.

"What happened to his wife?"

"Suicide," Dan said. "Or homicide. Take your choice."

"It happened before my time," Willy said. "Anything else I ought to know?"

"I'd suggest you get hold of Junior," Dan said. "He's been in trouble here in Morgan County, mostly for passing bad checks and welshing on debts. They get paid for in the end though."

"By his old man?"

"Sure. To a guy like Fantanni, the most important thing in the world is to perpetuate the line, so Fantanni will do anything to keep Junior whole and out of jail and capable of getting married."

"Fantanni," Willy said, "hinted right along that the stabbing was a family affair, which means Junior. Same thing with the netsukes. But why call me in if it's a family affair and he wants Junior free to go wooing?"

"Beats me," Dan said, "but don't forget they call him the Corkscrew."

It was a couple of days before Willy got around to making his visit. The house was set back in a few acres of woods and driveways, and it was all dressed up in new white paint. There were carved columns over the entrance and they went up to the second story where they supported a small porch decorated with a coat of arms. What looked like a real genuine fourteen-carat butler let Willy in and seemed a little disappointed that Willy didn't have a hat and a cane to hand over to him. Still, the butler got over it nicely and sent Willy into a living room big enough for three couches and some chairs that looked as if they'd been swiped from Buckingham Palace. Willy sat down on one of the couches and waited.

Richard J. Fantanni waddled in and laid himself out on one of the couches. "My wound," he said, touching the mound of flesh that overlaid his stomach. "I'm all bandaged up here."

"Who did it?" Willy said. "Who knifed you?"

"You asked me that at the hospital and I said I was too hurting to answer. I still am."

"About these netsukes of yours—" Willy said.

"They're over there," Fantanni said, gesturing. "In that cabinet. Here's the key, help yourself to a look. And notice the empty spaces. I've lost a diving girl and a carved bone from the Ashikaga period and a Shuzan hermit and a Shomin monkey and two Daikokus with rice bags."

Willy heard the words, but saw no reason to mourn. He didn't bother unlocking the glass cabinet, but he stared at the strangest collection of miniatures he'd ever seen. Fat little men with fat little men on their shoulders. Animals with the wrong legs or the wrong heads. Little men carrying mallets and heavy bags of something or other. Lots of monkeys and a couple of horses and a mermaid with a hole in her side. As a matter of fact, they all had holes. Toggles, to put a string through.

Willy went back and sat down in a green brocaded chair with a cushion that had a six-inch sink hole. "You say one of them gets taken every week?" he said.

"Pretty much."

"Does anybody have a key to that cabinet besides you?"

"Nobody."

"Where do you keep the key?"

"At my bedside."

"Then you took them yourself and you're trying to put something over on me."

"I've considered the possibility," Fantanni said. "I could have walked in my sleep. My son says I do, and I don't reject the theory."

"So where did you hide them?" Willy asked.

"Ah—" Fantanni seemed interested in the question "—did I but know."

"Who else lives in the house?" Willy asked.

"My butler and my cook. I call my butler Jeeves and I call my cook the Savarin. They have other names, but I forgot them long ago. I'll vouch for them as if they were myself."

"You just said you might have taken the stuff. How about them?"

"They're more honest and more trustworthy than I myself."

Which, Willy told himself, was no recommendation. But aloud he said, "Who else lives here?"

"My son lists this as his permanent residence. I wouldn't accuse him, although I admit he is not without tarnish."

"Is he available now?"

"No."

Willy walked over to the door, went to the end of a short corridor, and called out, "Jeeves! Will you tell Junior to come in here?"

Fantanni yelled out something that sounded like *Don't*, but his voice didn't carry all the way to the door and around a corner, so he gave up.

"You're pretty high-handed," he said to Willy when Willy came back.

Willy admitted it. "With somebody like you, I better be."

Fantanni said, "Ah," and relaxed until Junior stalked in.

He was a slender, good-looking boy in his twenties, and there was a kind of sulky appeal to him. Willy figured that women probably ached to hold him in their arms and cuddle him, despite all risks of pregnancy.

Fantanni said, "Junior, this man wants to question you. I forbid it."

Junior grinned amiably, and Willy walked over to him and took him by the arm, and when Willy takes you by the arm you wince and go wherever he leads you.

"You and me," Willy said, "are going to have a private conversation."

"Don't," Fantanni said, but Junior was getting walked out and into the next room, which was a kind of TV room with a couple of trick chairs that had levers and buttons that slid you up and down and gave you six or seven different places to park your feet. Willy, who liked toys, had to forgo the temptation and come to the point.

"Why," he said, "did you stab your old man?"

"Did he say I did?"

"Just tell me why."

"I didn't, but if I had the nerve I would have."

"Who do you think did?"

"Maybe Jeeves. Or the Savarin. They both hate him. He brags about how loyal they are and how good he treats them, but they hate him and they'd kill him if you paid them enough. But the Savarin loves to cook and Jeeves loves to pretend he's a butler, so they stick around."

"What have you got against your father?"

"Everything, but most of all, he won't let me marry Gertrude. He tries to keep me from seeing her and he says she's no good."

"Do you want to marry her?"

"Yes. She'll protect me and keep me out of trouble."

"What kind of trouble?"

"You know. Just trouble."

"Ever steal any of those netsukes?"

"Once, and he damn near killed me."

"Have you seen Gertrude lately?"

"She didn't do it," Junior said.

"Where is she?"

"At the Appleby farm. Appleby's her cousin."

"Good," Willy said. "Maybe I'll drop by and see her."

He touched one of the knobs on the arm of his chair to make sure it would do no harm. Then he hoisted himself up, nodded at Junior, and ambled back to Fantanni.

"Thanks for letting me see your son," Willy said. "Even if he don't know much, it was worthwhile seeing him."

"Ah!" Fantanni said.

Downstairs, Willy headed for the kitchen where a little man wearing a chef's cap was chopping celery and talking to himself. When he saw Willy, he whirled.

"I," the little man said, "am the Savarin—this is my kitchen."

"Nice and clean too," Willy said. "Like my wife's."

"Nobody," the little man said, "keeps a cleaner kitchen than me. Or cooks better."

"Granted," Willy said. "I'm Chief Wharton, County Police, and I figure you can tell me a couple of things about how your boss got knifed."

"I wasn't there," the Savarin said, "but I tell you this: somebody stole one of my knives and used it to cut him in the gut, and I don't like people fiddling around with my tools."

"Where's the knife?"

"I threw it away. How could I use something that was contaminated?"

"—Who took it?" Willy asked. The Savarin shrugged and Willy said, "Who knifed him? Junior?"

"Maybe," a voice said, and Willy turned around and saw Jeeves. "He certainly would," Jeeves said, "if he had the nerve, but has he?"

"If Junior didn't do it," Willy said, "then who did?"

The Savarin and Jeeves exchanged looks, and Jeeves answered. "I saw

no one, sir, but if you choose to interrogate me I can perhaps give you some valuable information."

"Like what?"

"Such as the nature of the car that was parked among the trees just short of the driveway. I believe, sir, that it was concealed intentionally."

"See who was in it?"

"No, sir."

"What kind of car? And the plates on it—did you notice the numbers?"

"I have an excellent memory," Jeeves said. "If I had seen the registration plates I would have remembered every digit."

"Seven-J," the Savarin said. "I saw the numbers. I got a lousy memory, but I remember Seven-J, and then eighteen something. Or maybe thirty-eight. Or else forty-seven. Something like that."

"What color was the car?"

"Lettuce-green," the Savarin said, "like iceberg."

"He is quite correct," Jeeves said. "I too observed the color. A light green Toyota. It was there at two o'clock. After that, I was too occupied with professional matters to notice anything else."

"Weren't you curious? A car hidden like that?"

"There are often cars hidden in the driveway, but they come for unknown purposes and I avoid the acquisition of embarrassing information."

Willy decided he was being kidded, so he said, "Keep on that way, you've got the lingo down pat."

"I try," Jeeves said, deadpan.

Before going back to his office, Willy stopped off at the Appleby farm. The long driveway that led to the farmhouse and barns curved past a couple of fields, but before it curved you could see an open area in back of the house. The space was used for parking, and Willy noted a pickup truck and a light green car that turned out to be a Toyota with license plates J7-8473, which was a nice mix of all the digits the little cook had mentioned.

Willy found Gertrude behind the house. She was digging a trench for some pipe, and when Gerty dug she hit the frostline in two scoops and then went halfway down to China just for the exercise. Willy went up to her and she stopped shoveling. She had the build of a fast halfback, and she overwhelmed you with health and virtue, and her light blue, guileless eyes were on a level with Willy's brown ones. She'd have made an im-

pressive model for a statue of the perfect female, and Willy introduced himself.

"I'm Chief Wharton and I just came from the Fantannis'," he said. "I was wondering what you were doing there the day before yesterday."

"I visited Junior," she said. "We went down to the lake and sat on the shore and threw stones while we talked about marriage and whether his father had really reformed."

"What did you decide?"

"Nothing, except that I said if Richard Senior hadn't reformed I'd try to make him."

"Were you in the house?"

"No."

"What if Jeeves said you were?"

"Jeeves," she said, "is a retired hit man and he likes to lie."

"Who told you about him?"

"Junior. He doesn't hide anything from me, including the fact that he wants to shoot his father but is afraid to. I don't believe he really would, do you?"

As Willy told Dan that evening at the Right Side Bar & Grill, she was a nut, but they were all nuts and she was a nicer nut than the rest of them.

"So what are you going to do?" Dan asked.

"Nothing. Nobody wants me to do anything, so I'll wait around until something happens, and it's bound to. Here I got a hit man turned butler, a crazy little cook, a racketeer who collects netsukes and wants his son to get married but won't let him. Any ideas?"

"One," Dan said. "Why did Fantanni go to a lousy little proprietary hospital run by a friend of his when we have one of the best hospitals in the state? Figure that one out, Willy."

Willy figured it out with his next breath. "I guess I slipped up," he said. "I'll check it out tomorrow."

Checking it out consisted of backing Dr. Danforth up against a wall. He'd operated? Yes. He'd had an anesthesiologist? No, he'd handled that himself. That was unusual, wasn't it? Not for this kind of operation. What kind was it, and where were the records? Well, the doctor hadn't filled them out yet. That was because there hadn't been an operation, had there? And Danforth stuttered and beat around the bush until Willy

nailed it down. Then Danforth threw up his hands and made his admission. He'd done a favor for a friend, and that was all there was to it.

So Fantanni hadn't been stabbed. He'd faked the assault and maybe he'd faked the robberies too, and Jeeves and the cook had backed him up and gone along with the story. But why make it up in the first place? Fantanni wanted to carry on the line, Dan was right about that, and here was a good healthy girl who could turn out little Fantannis for the next twenty years or so. What more could Fantanni want?

Willy, however, wasn't the type to brood, and with the weather fine all week he drove around the county and talked to everybody he could. Mostly, though, he listened and picked up odds and ends of information that went into the cold-storage compartment of his brain where they'd be ready in case he needed them.

He was breezing along Route 18 when his radio crackled out the information that Old Man Appleby had phoned to say there was trouble at the farm and the police had better get there. Since Willy was only a few miles away he stepped on the gas and burnt up the highway, and in a few minutes he was opposite the long driveway leading to the farm.

Slowed up as he was for the turn, he got a good look at the open space behind the farmhouse and he could see the three of them there, Fantanni and Junior and Gertrude. Gertrude had hold of a hammer and while Willy couldn't see what she was doing with it Fantanni was trying to grab it out of her hands. Junior wasn't much more than an innocent bystander, but somehow Willy got the idea that he could be a lot more dangerous than the others.

To stop whatever was happening or going to happen, Willy stuck his finger on the siren button, but he didn't know what effect it had because the driveway had that big curve where for twenty seconds or so the house cut off his view of the whole parking area. By the time he got there and was jumping out of the car everything had changed.

First of all, Fantanni and Gertrude were rolling on the ground in a kind of wrestling match. Gertrude had dropped the hammer and it was lying on the ground next to a couple of netsukes, but the main thing right now was Junior. He had a gun and he was jumping around near Gertrude and Fantanni and trying to get a clear shot at one of them, but the way they were tangled up his chances weren't much. Still, they were likely to disengage any second and that was what Junior was waiting for.

Maybe Willy shouldn't have yelled, but he did. He let out a war whoop

that scared the hell out of everybody, and they all did the wrong thing. Fantanni let go of Gertrude and she pulled loose and tried to stand up, but she lost her balance and for a moment she went reeling backwards. Her blouse was practically ripped off of her and her hair was all over her face and looked like shredded wheat, and she went toppling back and landed sitting on a couple of netsukes. Fantanni started to hoist himself up, only what with that belly of his it was tough going. He had to get on his hands and knees first, then he had to lean back and somehow get one knee levered forward so he could prop his belly on it, and all of that took time.

Willy kept on yelling. His idea was to make Junior forget about his old man and pay attention to Willy, but it didn't work out that way. Junior was interested in murder and he finally got his chance, so he fired twice and scored both times. Then Willy flattened him with a flying tackle that knocked Junior silly. After that, Willy just picked up the gun. He didn't even handcuff Junior until later on.

Willy told Dan about it that evening. "Gertrude ought to get a couple of medals," Willy said. "She made a tourniquet out of a hunk of her blouse and used a netsuke to tighten it, then she held Fantanni against her and soothed him like a kid, to prevent shock. Without her, Fantanni would have been a goner."

"What started it all?"

"Junior says his father wanted to have Gertrude arrested for stealing the netsukes. He claimed Jeeves had seen her and could prove it, and Junior said that was nonsense, so they decided to go see Gertrude and hear what she had to say. That's where Appleby comes in."

"What does he say?" Dan asked.

"That Gertrude admitted having the netsukes and accused Fantanni of planting them in her room, where she'd found them this morning. According to Appleby she said, 'I don't want the damn things, I hate them,' and then she grabbed a hammer and tried to bang them up. That's when the fight started. Fantanni got mad and took a poke at her and she popped back with a slap to his kisser, so Appleby ran to the phone and called the police."

"What does Fantanni say?"

"Nothing, yet. He's in intensive care and can't talk, and won't for at

least a few days, but I won't be seeing him again. From now on it's up to the D.A., he has all the stuff."

Dan, who couldn't bear to leave a problem unsolved or watch a loose end dangle, said, "Let's analyze this, Willy. Here's Fantanni, the expert who specializes in red herrings and sleight of hand, and he'll diddle and bluff and fake to the right when he's going to the left. So what is he after? To a man like him, the most important thing in the world is family. Perpetuate the line. So why is he trying to break up Junior's match with a girl like Gertrude?"

Willy got it then, and the idea hit him like a Joe Louis left hook. "He wants her for himself," Willy said. "But he can't just shove Junior aside, because Gertrude will still have a yen for him even if she's willing to go along with Fantanni. So Fantanni has to destroy Junior completely and show him up as a rat, and he started off with the netsuke gambit and hinting Junior took them."

"Which wasn't enough," Dan said. "He followed that up with the assault ploy, which probably would have worked out if you hadn't shown it up as a fake. So what was left?"

"Plenty," Willy said. "He laid the groundwork for charges of larceny or assault, and for perpetrators he had Junior and Gertrude and Jeeves and the Savarin, take your choice."

"So he framed Gertrude," Dan said. "I think he was playing it by ear and waiting to see what would happen. He could be big-hearted and forgive her and earn her eternal gratitude. Or he could accuse Junior of framing her. He probably hadn't decided yet, but Gertrude saw through it and things got out of control."

"And ended up the way Fantanni wanted. Junior's a patricide case and Gertrude's falling all over herself with sympathy for the poor guy in the hospital."

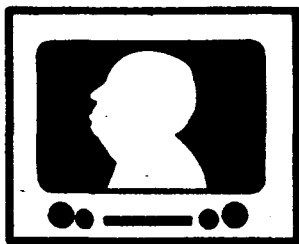
"If he lives," Dan said.

Willy conceded the point. "Still, that fat slob? What kind of a girl is going to fall for him?"

Dan allowed himself a cliché. "Time," he said, "will tell."

Which was prophetic, because the Fantanni who came out of the hospital after a couple of months and proposed to Gertrude had lost fifty pounds. And with Junior locked up in jail and Fantanni loaded with all that dough, how could she say no?

She did.



CRIME ON SCREEN

by Peter Christian

My name is James Bond. I am agent 007 in the Secret Service. The double O means that I have a license to kill in the execution of my duties. That means I get the dirty jobs—the jobs you never read about in the newspapers, the ones even the Government would rather know nothing about. So Ian Fleming allows Bond to describe himself in an early screen treatment the author was vainly working up. But, as Steven Jay Rubin tells us in his impressively researched study *The James Bond Films* (Arlington House), Fleming's attempts to convert his book hero into a screen figure were not paying off.

Success was not immediate even for Fleming's novels. His first three Bond books had sold depressingly slowly, and only a note calling his writing "forceful and driving" from his pal Raymond Chandler cheered him on. At the same time he had hoped his creative efforts might somehow reach the motion picture screen; however, nothing seemed to work. Alexander Korda (a friend) had asked to see an advance copy of his second book, *Live and Let Die*, only to turn it down promptly. An extensive motion picture treatment Fleming had composed, pitting Bond against the Mafia (they have stolen an atomic bomb in Nassau) seemed going nowhere. A producer at NBC asked him to collaborate on *Commander Jamaica*, a half-hour adventure series for which Fleming created one James Gunn, to pursue the villains using a Caribbean island base to deflect U.S. missiles coming from Cape Canaveral, but the deal fell through. (Fleming recycled the plot for his sixth novel, *Dr. No*.) CBS optioned the Bond character for a proposed television series; Fleming constructed

several plot outlines (they turned up later in a collection of Bond short stories, *For Your Eyes Only*), but that deal, too, failed to sell.

Interestingly, James Bond's first appearance outside of print was—in fact—on *television*. In desperation Fleming had sold the rights to his first book, *Casino Royale*, to CBS-TV for a thousand dollars. The story was handsomely mounted for the prestigious new mystery series *Climax!*, originating live from the newly-built CBS Television City in Hollywood. American Barry Nelson played Bond and Peter Lorre was Le Chiffre, a Russian agent, with Linda Christian diverting the duo momentarily from a final baccarat duel. Despite a lavishness of budget rare for that time (1954) and the expanded facilities and technical advances the movie capital could offer television, *Casino Royale*—dealing with Bond's clash with Le Chiffre at the world's largest gambling palace—was reduced to a rather cramped production, with none of the panoramic vistas and high adventure that made the later film series so notable.

It was not until eight years later that *Dr. No* was filmed, on the extremely limited budget of \$900,000, less than was spent on set construction alone for the Bond films that followed. In an October, 1979, column, *COS* detailed the care and wisdom invested in the project by its energetic, resourceful producers, Harry Saltzman and Cubby Broccoli. Fleming had wanted an urbane, "name" player for Bond: Richard Burton, perhaps, or David Niven, or even James Mason. Broccoli, aware of his lean budget, insisted on a lesser known, younger actor, a rugged Englishman good with his fists and possessed of powerful sex appeal. He had seen a print of the Walt Disney live-action fantasy, *Darby O'Gill and the Little People*, and was impressed with the dark Scot who was its lead: Sean Connery, whom he had also met at a Hollywood party. *Dr. No*'s dashing director, Terence Young, took Connery to his personal tailor before filming began and clothed him in the sort of apparel befitting Bond's champagne-and-caviar manner.

The casting of the other roles was equally expert. Swiss-born beauty Ursula Andress was offered the part of the vengeful Amazon, Honeychile Ryder; her then husband, John Derek, persuaded her to accept it. Noel Coward, Fleming's Jamaica neighbor, was asked to play the role of the title villain but refused: "Dear Ian, the answer to Dr. No is No, No, No!" Character actor Joseph Wiseman, a man with a most sinister voice, was then chosen as the Fu Manchu-like master criminal who lurks on his own island, Crab Key, manipulating his own atomic reactor. Although he is

spared the hooks for hands he has in the Fleming novel, his evil is far more insidious in the film, much of it the inspiration of scriptwriter Richard Maibaum. Maibaum also refined Bond's screen image, adding a touch of humor to soften the grim toughness of the mirthless spy Fleming had created.

Maibaum invented the very visual way Bond was introduced in each film. In the opening minutes of *Dr. No*, after three supposedly blind calypso beggars kill the British agents at the Jamaica listening station, we switch to London gaming tables and our first look at 007, who turns when a dazzling beauty asks his name: "I admire your luck, Mr. . . . ?" Our hero flicks open a gunmetal cigarette lighter. "Bond. James Bond." It is a colorful, riveting introduction, and each succeeding film begins with a similar swift, pre-credit teaser. In *Goldfinger*, for instance, we first see Bond—a decoy seabird propped on his head—rise out of the ocean in a frogman's suit, explode a storage tank filled with poppy plants, and step out of his wetsuit revealing a white dinner jacket, complete with carnation, underneath. He then walks into a nightclub and nearly succumbs to the deadly lures of a flamenco dancer. Audiences came to expect and to cheer the Bond films' swift-action openers.

Dr. No never resurfaces after Bond flips him into the boiling pool of his nuclear reactor, but later villains are survivors. Ernst Stavro Blofeld, the cruel chief of SPECTRE, was first seen in *From Russia With Love* as only a pair of hands stroking a white kitten while he directed an army of minions against a beleaguered Bond. In *You Only Live Twice* Donald Pleasence portrayed the mastermind, a wicked scar running the length of his face, who lurks under a Japanese volcano that doubles as a missile silo. Properly disposed of at the end of that film, Blofeld manages to resurrect himself without explanation in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* where he is hiding in the Swiss Alps as a world-famous allergist determined to wage biological warfare on the world's livestock and grain production. Blofeld (this time portrayed by Telly Savalas) breaks his neck in a toboggan chase but turns up in the very next film, *Diamonds Are Forever*, in the person of elegant Charles Gray, now in Las Vegas cloning yet other versions of himself!

On Her Majesty's Secret Service ranks among the very best of the Bond films but is little known. Unfairly slighted because it was the first Bond movie not to use the services of Sean Connery (he had become tired of the role and walked away from it, replaced by Australian model George

Lazenby), the film explores depths of characterization and feeling new to the series: Bond falls in love and marries Tracy. (Diana Rigg), the headstrong daughter of a Sicilian crime chieftain. Almost immediately after their wedding she is shot down by Blofeld just as Bond tells her: "We have all the time in the world. . . ."

The Bond films of the seventies were less original. They mostly seemed to recycle patterns of action and plot first structured in *Goldfinger*, the ultimate Bond adventure and top of the lot. The humor, too, became more giddy and camp. The pre-credit teaser was more outrageous with each film: at the start of *The Spy Who Loved Me* Bond appears to ski off the top of a sheer cliff-face only to release a parachute emblazoned with a Union Jack after a heart-stopping fall. *Moonraker* goes that stunt one better with a free fall from an airplane *without* a parachute. The latest entry, *For Your Eyes Only*, is almost a parody: Bond visits the grave of his wife in an English country cemetery, is ushered by a wicked priest into a gyrocopter, and finds himself dangling high in midair from the machine, under the remote control of a figure—bald, and wearing a neck-brace—we can only assume to be Blofeld once more, with as many lives as the white kitten forever nestling in his lap.

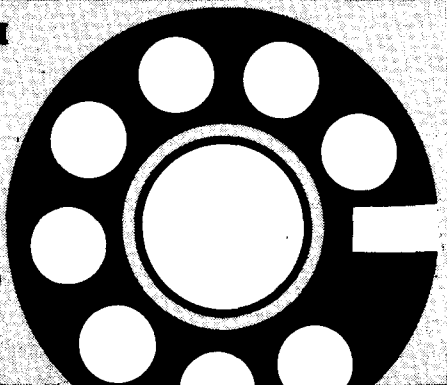
The Bond films have long ago run out of usable Fleming plots, and indeed have just about used all of Fleming's colorful titles. The audiences are still here, however, and the largest money-maker of all melodrama series will surely continue to feed this audience the champagne and caviar of James Bond's style of espionage adventure.

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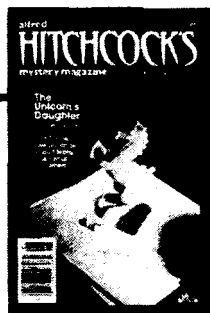
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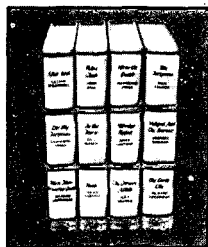
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